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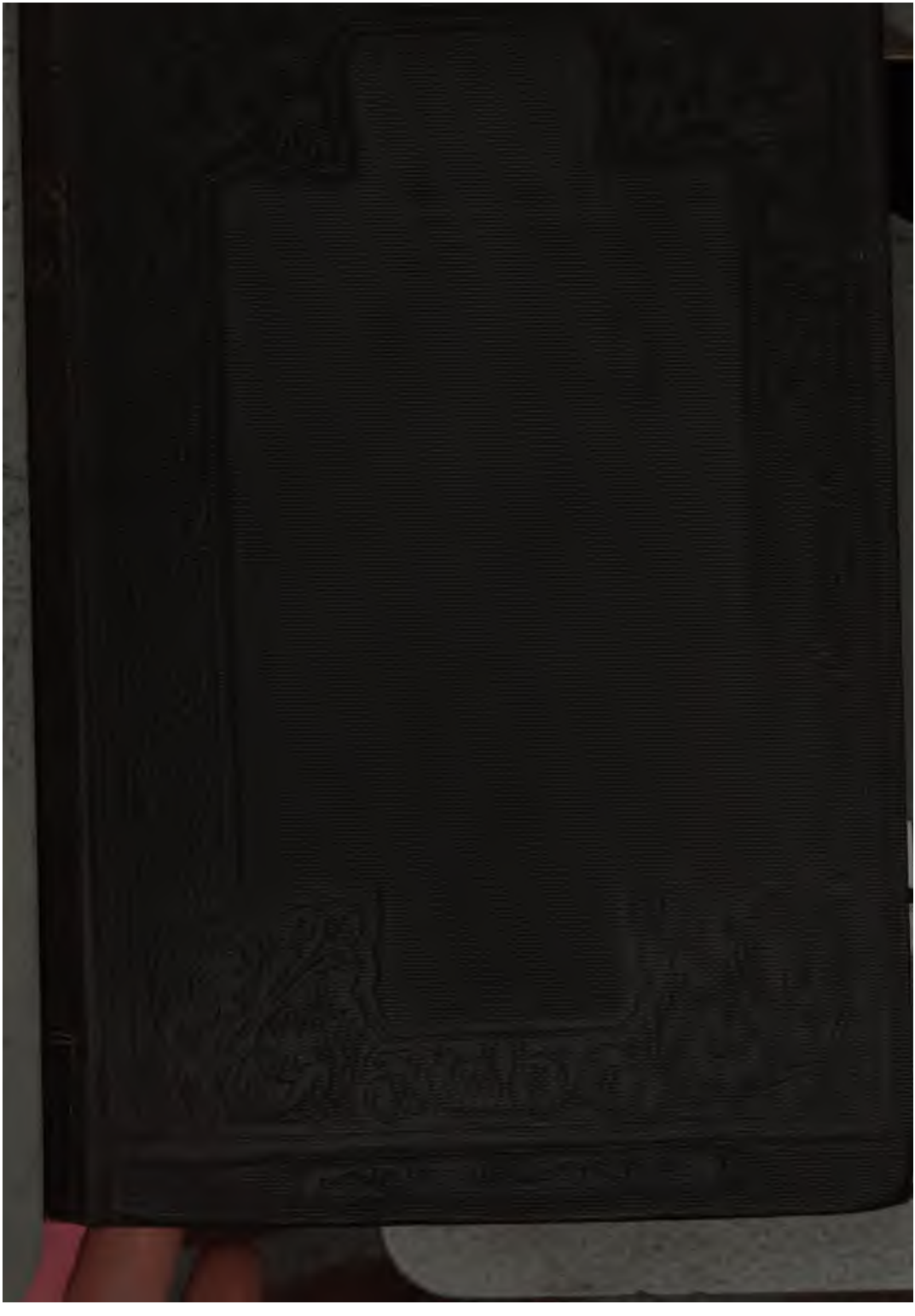

Christian Festivals and Natural Seasons.

DISCOURSES

SUGGESTED BY THE PRINCIPAL EPOCHS OF THE CHRISTIAN AND OF THE NATURAL YEAR,

WITH OTHERS,

SELECTED FROM THE PAPERS OF THE LATE

REV. J. G. ROBBERDS.

WITH

MEMOIR,

REPRINTED FROM THE "CHRISTIAN REFORMER" FOR JUNE, 1854.

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TO THE MEMBERS

OF

THE CONGREGATION OF PROTESTANT DISSENTERS

ASSEMBLING FOR WORSHIP

AT

CROSS STREET CHAPEL, MANCHESTER,

THIS VOLUME,

A SMALL GATHERING FROM THE FRUITS OF A MINISTRY

OF

FORTY-THREE YEARS EXERCISED IN THEIR SERVICE,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THE EDITORS.

PREFACE.

THIS little volume owes its publication, in part to the earnestly expressed wishes of several friends—in part also to a conviction that some such Memorial of its departed Author would be acceptable to a much larger number of hearers and admirers. How imperfect a memorial of the living preacher is supplied by his "word of exhortation" thus coldly set forth in the printed page, none, indeed, can be more deeply sensible than those to whom has naturally fallen the task—the pleasing, though at the same time melancholy, and not unanxious task—of preparing these Discourses for the press. The written or printed word is mostly but a poor and inefficient substitute for the animated speaker; and they believe that they shall be supported by the testimony of all who ever heard him, in the expression of their opinion, that it may be expected to be more than

ordinarily inadequate to convey a just idea of Mr. ROBBERDS's winning power. But very many—perhaps the greater number—of those into whose hands the following pages will come—will be able, in some measure, to supply from their own recollections that which is needed for their full effect; and, as they read, to accompany in their imagination the words which their eyes follow, with the expression of voice and of look, that a revering and attached memory tells them would have helped to urge them home to the heart.

It is hoped, however—nay, confidently believed—that readers of these Discourses, to whom their Author was personally unknown, will find much in them to please in the elegant simplicity of their style; and to edify, to comfort, and to encourage, in the practical wisdom, and the strong and cheerful spirit of faith, hope, and charity, that pervades their substance. That the selection which has been made, from the very large mass of manuscript that Mr. ROBBERDS left behind him, is the best that could have been made, the Editors will by no means presume to affirm. The work of selection it is that has constituted their principal difficulty and anxiety. Very earnest has been at least their desire, at once

to give a fair representation of the general character of Mr. ROBBERDS's pulpit services, and to justify their having taken upon themselves the responsibility of publication.

In conclusion, they would take this opportunity of expressing their heartfelt thanks to their friend the Rev. JOHN JAMES TAYLER, for his kindness in originally drawing up the memoir prefixed, as also in giving his sanction to its appearance with the present volume; and to their friend the EDITOR of the *Christian Reformer*, for his permission to reprint it from the pages of that periodical.

M. R.
C. W. R.
J. R.

NOTE.—It has been thought that a specification of the dates of the composition of the several Sermons would be acceptable to many readers. As, however, the Sermon has in several instances been printed from a re-written manuscript, with more or less alteration by the Author himself, it is desirable to state that the date given is always that of the *original composition*.

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MEMOIR.

THERE is something inexpressibly solemn, almost startling, in being called on for the first time to contemplate deliberately as a subject of history, associated now with the honoured band of the virtuous and the wise who have vanished irrevocably from earth, —the friends whose influence had entered largely into our whole consciousness of existence, and with whom, through all our most active years of life, we had been in habits of constant and kindly intercourse. It is only on such occasions that we are sensible of the depth and grandeur of sentiment which penetrates those simple words of Scripture, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." We can well understand the feeling which has led men in all ages to look with a sort of religious veneration on the virtuous dead. Death seems to invest with a mysterious consecration those who have passed through it, and taken with them the affection and reverence of survivors into the realm of awful and unbroken silence which lies beyond it. Their human

errors and frailties are forgotten, as things that have been and are no more; while the memory of all the good which they have designed and accomplished—of good which in its own nature is imperishable—seems to disengage itself from every darkening adhesion of infirmity, and to shine out from the quiet sphere where they now dwell, with a pure and unearthly lustre, for the guidance and encouragement of those who have yet a remnant of their pilgrimage to achieve. We are irresistibly impelled to compare those who are gone, with those who remain; what we have lost, with what we still preserve; what they did, with what we have now to do. If such a retrospect should in some respects be painful and depressing, it may, on the other hand, have the effect of awakening us to a deeper sense of our present responsibilities, and furnish us with a stronger incentive to emulate in Christian earnestness and fidelity, the able and accomplished men who have gone before us. It is under these feelings that we offer to our readers the following brief sketch of the life and character of the excellent man and faithful minister of whom we have been recently deprived.

The late Rev. JOHN GOOCH ROBBERDS was born in the city of Norwich, on the 18th of May, 1789. His family by his father's side had been connected with the Presbyterian congregation in Norwich for several generations. His great-grandfather came to Norwich immediately from London, but was of a Yorkshire family, being, it is believed, as well as his wife whose

name was Whittaker, originally from Leeds. The late Mr. Robberds's father was engaged in trade at Norwich, where some members of the family attained the highest civic honours. Mr. J. W. Robberds, well known to the literary world as the biographer of the late ingenious but eccentric William Taylor, the early friend of Southey,—as well as by some translations from the German, and a few other works,—was second cousin to the subject of this memoir.

It is always interesting to trace a connection between those who in different countries have suffered for the cause of religious truth and freedom, and to point to instances where Nonconformist worthies of the present generation have sprung from the intermingling of Puritan with Huguenot blood. Our late friend could claim this honourable distinction. His mother, whose maiden name was Harrell, descended from a French Protestant family who escaped to England at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They settled in Norwich at the same time, it is supposed, as the Martineaus and several other families under similar circumstances,—where these refugees for conscience' sake introduced an important branch of foreign trade, and where a small place of worship, still known as the French church, was set apart and endowed for their usé. The name is supposed to have been originally Harèle, but was corrupted in time into the more English form of Harrell. The name of Harrell is now extinct. The tradition was not very clear among the descendants, whether the

family arrived immediately from Flanders or from Normandy; but a story was current, that their common ancestor came over in the same vessel with a little girl of whom he took much notice during the voyage, and whom he afterwards married. What her name was, is not known. Such are the dim and fading reminiscences in a later generation, of events which seemed at the time to those immediately affected by them, the all-absorbing realities of our human world, and which connect the obscure and unrecorded vicissitudes of private life, colouring the thoughts and affections of many a quiet and pious home perhaps for a century, with the grander features of social revolution that stand out distinct and prominent from the wide survey of universal history.

Mr. Robberds was placed by his father in the grammar-school of Norwich, at that time under the conduct of Dr. Forster, a man of learning and an elegant scholar, but of indolent habits, it is said, and not much of a disciplinarian. Those who would learn, he delighted to assist, but the idle he rather left to themselves. Young Robberds was his favourite pupil, and captain of the school. It was customary for the head boy to deliver a Latin oration in the porch of the school, on the guild-day, at the inauguration of the new Mayor; and when the late Dr. Rigby (father of the present Dr. Rigby, of London,) was elected to that office, Robberds was appointed to pronounce the speech. We cannot do better than transcribe an account of the scene in the graphic

language of Mr. Edward Taylor, then present, and now Professor of Music in Gresham College:

"Robberds was my junior, for I was then (though just of age) one of the municipal body. And I well remember him, a fair boy, with almost white hair, stepping on the platform, and beginning his address, 'Prætor dignissime, Prætor designate (i.e. the Mayor elect, who was on his way from the Cathedral to the Guildhall, to be sworn into office) et Senatores omnes utriusque ordinis,' etc. etc.

"Perhaps, having but recently myself left school, I was a better judge of his composition than I should be now; but the elegance of it struck me at the time. About twenty-five years before, the present Bishop of Durham occupied the same position in the school, under Dr. Parr; both he and the mayor to whom he addressed himself being regular attendants at the Octagon chapel, where the Bishop's father is buried." Mr. Taylor adds, in reference to his late friend; "Though long separated, we always met as old friends, and distance and time never abated (I believe I may say) our mutual regard."

At this time Mr. Robberds was about sixteen, and soon after commenced his studies for the Christian ministry in Manchester New College, then recently removed to York, under the charge of the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, for whose character and instructions he ever retained an affectionate regard and deep respect, and who still survives to deplore the loss of a favourite pupil. He had been originally intended for business;

but the late Rev. Pendlebury Houghton, who was then pastor of the Octagon chapel, and discerned the promise of his youth, induced his father to educate him for the ministry. Next to his mother, of whom he was the especial delight and pride, Mr. Houghton had perhaps the largest share in the early formation of his character and the direction of his tastes. Two evenings in the week he regularly spent with his venerable friend, besides constant intercourse at other times. Among the very few products of Mr. Robberds's pen beyond the circle of professional duty, is an elegant and characteristic Memoir of Mr. Houghton, accompanying his volume of posthumous Sermons. To Mr. Houghton's peculiar cast of mind, at once playful and contemplative, that of Mr. Robberds, with more of vigour and brilliancy, bore a considerable resemblance. The members of his family who still survive, recur with grateful and pensive pleasure to this period of his life. A very near and dear relative thus writes respecting him: "The younger children were early taught by their mother to look up to him with a love and reverence which they have retained through life; for instead of their devotion spoiling him, it only made him more brotherly and affectionate;" nor does the same writer "ever remember, even from her earliest days, one unkind word or even look, though she has a distinct recollection of so many acts and words of love during various periods of her whole life."

On the completion of his academic course, Mr.

Robberds, whose superior pulpit talents had already attracted notice, received invitations to undertake the pastoral office from two of the most important congregations in the denomination to which he belonged,—the Octagon at Norwich, and the Old chapel at Manchester. He made his election in favour of the latter; and early in the year 1811, became a co-pastor of the Cross Street congregation with the late Rev. John Grundy. Shortly after his settlement at Manchester, he married Mary, the eldest daughter of the Rev. William Turner, then of Newcastle-upon-Tyne,—a venerable patriarch still living, who has survived all his children but one. By this alliance he was doubly bound to the duties of his sacred vocation. He was now connected with a family, rich in traditions of religious worth, each successive generation of which, almost from the commencement of Protestant Nonconformity, had furnished the church with able and faithful ministers; while in the calm religious principle and self-forgetting benevolence of his excellent partner, he secured a blessing to his home and an invaluable aid to his pastoral influence. From this period till the day of his decease, his tranquil and virtuous life offers few incidents to record. It was serenely passed in the quiet of his home, in the enjoyment of social intercourse, and in the prosecution of his ministerial studies and duties. For some years he was an instructor of youth; but not finding this occupation congenial to his taste, he at length abandoned it, and devoted his whole time and

thoughts to the work of the ministry. He now commenced a career of eminent usefulness, and during the full vigour of his powers, was one of the most popular and successful preachers in the Presbyterian and Unitarian churches. On the restoration of the College from York to Manchester in the autumn of 1840, he was appointed Professor of Pastoral Theology and of the Hebrew and Syriac Languages. Failing health compelled him after some years to relinquish these additional duties. His pupils speak with lively gratitude of the uniform kindness and cordiality of his instructions, and of the admirable judgment and good taste which dictated his criticisms on their compositions. He experienced a striking and unexpected proof of the estimation in which he was held, on the death of one of his oldest hearers, the late Dr. Holme. That learned and distinguished physician, who bequeathed his valuable library and the bulk of his property to University College, London, left Mr. Robberds an estate in Westmoreland, the acquisition of which relieved his mind from pecuniary solicitude about the closing years of life, and the support of his family after his death. Mr. Robberds's habits were so simple and healthful, his temper so placid, and his spirits so uniform and lively, that his friends anticipated for him a protracted and vigorous age. Some years, however, before his decease, he began to be oppressed with a difficulty of breathing, and his outward appearance indicated gradual decline. He foresaw the result; yet in the

constant presence of death, he maintained unaltered to the last his habitual serenity and cheerfulness. On the morning of April the 21st, 1854, he was summoned from his family and the world, having completed in connection with one congregation, a long unbroken ministry of forty-three years. How deeply he was mourned and honoured and loved, the large attendance of all ranks and parties at his grave, and the crowded, sympathizing audience which listened to the funeral sermon of his attached friend and fellow-pastor, Mr. Gaskell, abundantly attested.*

* Mr. Robberds was averse from publication, and disliked composition except in immediate connection with the duties of his office. We are not aware that he ever contributed an article to any periodical. Early in life, we believe, he read two papers before the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, of which we remember to have heard good judges, the late Dr. Henry and the late Mr. Ewart, speak with much approval. But they were not printed, and we are unable now to recover their exact title. [They appear to have been named respectively, "Observations on Public Libraries" and "On Places of Burial." *Eds.*] His just celebrity as a preacher caused him, however, frequently to appear before the public as an author. Exclusive of discourses delivered on domestic occasions, and printed only for private circulation, we believe the titles and dates of the more important of his publications are contained in the following list:—

(1) "On Christian Conversion;" Unitarian Fund, June 19, 1824.

(2) "An Answer to the Lord Chancellor's Question, 'What is a Unitarian?'" July 5, 1825. [This Discourse came to a second, if not a third edition.]

(3) "Christ One with God;" Western Unitarian Society, July 18, 1827.

(4) "The Duty of Christians to seek the Improvement of their Fellow-men;" Newcastle Unitarian Tract Society, August 23, 1829.

Such is the short and simple biography of a kind and good, and truly Christian man. It is a tale soon told; it is summed up in the brief recital of the duties of the home and the church—in the grateful memorial of high responsibilities faithfully sustained, of pure affections religiously cherished, of superior abilities diligently cultivated and honourably employed. Except

---

(5) "Christians the best Name for Disciples of Christ;" Sunderland, August 30, 1829.

(6) "The Need of more and better Provision for Popular Education."

(7) "The One and Vital Faith of Christians:" Western Unitarian Society, August 16, 1837.

(8) "The Duty of a Christian Church in relation to the World;" Opening of Upper Brook-street Chapel, Manchester, September 1, 1839.

(9) "The Voice of the Dead;" Death of Dr. Channing, Cross Street, November 13, 1842.

(10) "The Value of Energy in Union with Benevolence;" Death of Sir Thomas Potter, Cross Street, 1845.

(11) "The Importance of Conscientiousness in the Use of Influence;" Death of Mr. J. E. Taylor, Cross Street, January 14, 1844.

(12) "A Word for Charity amidst many Words for Creeds."

(13) "The Fishers of Men;" Unitarian Association, Essex Street, London, June 3, 1846.

(14) "Popery in all Churches, the Proper Object of Protestant Antagonism;" Cross Street, November 17, 1850.

(15) "On the Prevailing Charges against Unitarians;" Norwich Eastern Unitarian Society, June 28, 1820.

The Memoir of Mr. Houghton has been already alluded to. Besides these, there are two Sermons on "Vain Thoughts," and two on "Temper," published in Dr. Beard's volumes of Discourses; a Sermon "On the Two Natures in Christ," of which the date cannot be found; and another "On the Love of Knowledge conducive to Happiness and Virtue," preached for the Cambridge Street Sunday Schools, Birmingham, July 29, 1838.

in records of the necessary discharge of professional or public duty, it never wanders from the quiet and sequestered path of private life, and presents nothing to enrich the page of the historian, or fill a place in the annals of literature. Of a man so richly gifted as Mr. Robberds, we may regret that so little should remain to tell coming generations who and what he was. But this consideration has its redeeming and compensatory aspect. The best and happiest lives —those which steal with silent blessing through the world, and to the distant eye give no sign of their existence but in the brighter verdure which marks their hidden course—are often those of which there is the least to record. Mr. Robberds, above most men of equal ability whom we have ever known—too much, perhaps, for his just reputation in the field of letters and authorship—had a calm and dignified contempt for the vulgar ambition and restless craving after notoriety, which impels so many inferior minds to rush into print, and display themselves continually in the public eye. With true religious wisdom, he accepted life as a precious boon, a sacred deposit, from the great and good Father of the universe —not to be feverishly consumed amidst endless bustle and excitement, but to be steadily enriched and adorned with Christian duty, and tranquilly enjoyed with Christian thankfulness and trust. With an eye reverently fixed on its inevitable termination, he spent it gladly and gratefully, as a season of discipline and preparation for the future life, which to his

clear, untroubled vision of faith, was a reality as distinct and assured as the present. Few minds were more habitually under the influence of that silent beauty, and indwelling poetry, which quiet and loving natures detect under the commonest aspects of things; and this quintessence of life—these precious drops from the inmost fountain of being—he had exquisite skill in drawing forth from all scenes, and out of every passing event, and distilling day by day into the ordinary cup of human experience. This habitual self-surrender to the gentle and pleasant influences of existence, left at times on the beholder an impression of indolence, and almost of indifference to the pressing concerns of the world. And it must be admitted, he had a constitutional aversion to all constrained and artificial effort—to all over-excitement of the faculties. Yet he would have been unfairly and inadequately described as an indolent man. The principle of duty was powerful and steady in his character. Professional calls he regarded as his first obligation, and never neglected. When these were efficiently discharged, his view of life made it a religious duty to keep his mind free from turmoil and agitation, and to nurse it with the quiet and holy thoughts which come, whenever they are sought, day by day, from the Parent Spirit to the devout and expectant mind. In the distribution of his time, and the prosecution of his daily duties, he was orderly and systematic. A portion of every day was passed in his library, in studies which bore more or less directly on his sacred

vocation. Though he never affected the character of a severe student, the steady uniformity of his application enabled him to execute a great deal in the course of a long ministerial life, and to familiarize himself with those branches of learning which furnish the accomplished minister of Christ. He had closely studied the Scriptures in the original Hebrew and Greek, and was well acquainted with the Syriac version. At one time of his life, he had also studied with much care the doctrinal questions at issue between different Christian Churches. Of this, many of his published sermons are a convincing proof. But his natural tastes—we may add, his distinguishing gifts—did not attract him to the polemics of divinity. Whatever he has done in this way (and what he did, he did excellently well), was altogether dictated by a sense of professional duty; and perhaps few men, not by nature controversially disposed, have preached in the course of their ministry more earnestly and more effectively on important controversial points. But he had too refined and catholic a spirit, and too deep a sense of what was beautiful in the common faith and life of all genuine Christianity, to insist with any eagerness, except when compelled in self-defence or self-vindication, on the speculative dogmas which separate good and religious men. It was on the permanent and the universal in Christian truth that he loved to dwell—that deep, eternal substratum of heavenly trust and hope, which underlies the torn and tumbled surface of sectarian strife, and

will endure, grand, solid, unchanged, when all this has been broken up and swept away. It was significant of the spirit which swayed his whole religious life, and which gathered new strength as he advanced in years, that he took for the motto of one of his later printed discourses, Vincentius's well-known definition of catholic Christianity—*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.* Nor had he failed to make himself acquainted with the more important results of German theology, and would sometimes, when young men were astonishing their unlearned hearers with novel theories, remind them, with good humoured and characteristic pleasantry, that he knew where they had got those stolen goods. The metaphysical subtleties, the vague abstractions, the elaborate minuteness, the vast but ponderous erudition of the Germans, were little, it must be confessed, in harmony with his peculiar constitution of mind. He had nothing of the mere antiquary, or of the dry metaphysician in his composition. All things, to have value and beauty in his eye, must be in contact with human realities, and tinged with the colour of human affections. To this intellectual temperament must be ascribed his extreme fondness for the literature of fiction, especially when it was pure, kindly and graceful, and that happy alchemy of mind by which he could extract from its gayest and most humorous pages, some elements of a diviner wisdom to give sweetness and geniality to the earnest words of the preacher. His was peculiarly an English

mind. He had its calm good sense, its playful humour, its pure and healthy tastes, its quiet, home-born relish of innocent enjoyment. Though a sound and ripe scholar, well read in general learning, and versed in the proper studies of his profession, yet it was English literature which he specially loved, and with which he was most intimately familiar; it was English learning, that of our great divines and moralists, which he had most deeply studied; and it was amidst our English scenery that he delighted to wander. With a passionate fondness for the picturesque, he never once quitted our own shores in search of it. Our rich and cultured vales, chequered with meadow and corn land, with pleasant homesteads and village spires nestling among the trees, our sheltered glens, our brooks dashing over their rocky beds, our sweet and placid lakes shut in by grassy slopes and mountain heads,—these were the source from which his mind fed itself with beauty, and he asked for nothing more; these sufficed for his utmost contentment, and filled his pure mind with a sense of ineffable joy. It was delightful to witness his thorough enjoyment of such scenes—how he seemed to imbibe the loveliness that was around him at every pore—his even, measured step and tranquil bearing, which seemed fearful of dispersing it by one harsh or restless or anxious thought—and that beaming look which reflected the peace within, and said expressively, "I want no higher bliss than this converse with God in the silent beauty of his works."

Nowhere did he appear to greater advantage than at his own fireside, or in the society of a few familiar friends, where he could thoroughly unbend and give the rein to his inexhaustible pleasantry. On such occasions he was a charming companion. His wit gushed forth sportive and free at every turn, splashing right and left with indiscriminate hilarity, but withal so kindly and genial, that the memory of those happy hours when it played and sparkled in the sunshine of friendship, and refreshed the hearts on which it fell, is one of unmingled delightfulness, and for all who ever shared them, will remain among the brightest spots in their retrospect of the past. Though too much indisposed to all studied effort, to aim at the higher achievements of conversational talent, and too averse to the very semblance of strife, ever to signalize himself in argument, yet his society was sought and valued by some distinguished men; for he had a happy readiness of expression, and his manners were courteous and dignified. The late Dr. Parr always noticed him with marked friendliness during his visits to Manchester, and sometimes heard him preach. On one of these occasions, a stiff Churchman, somewhat scandalized that the Doctor should sanction a conventicle with his presence, asked sarcastically, "Well, Doctor, where will you go next?" "To heaven, Sir, I hope," was the reply, "if I follow that young man's precepts." Parr was accustomed to cite Mr. Robberds, with some others, as a proof that the Unitarian ministry was not illiterate.

By habits of admirable order and wise economy, Mr. Robberds was enabled with a limited income to exercise through a long life a liberal hospitality, and wherever the assistance of his fellow-creatures was concerned, to practise a generous and ungrudging charity. As a preacher, he possessed some striking excellences. His style was clear, simple and purely English, interspersed at times with passages of great beauty and vivid picturesque effect. In his early years it had more of that finished elegance which belongs to the essay; but latterly he had purposely rendered it colloquial and even homely, more resembling that of a speaker than of a writer. We heard him once remark, that he was well aware that his style had suffered from this cause; but, with true conscientiousness, he had sacrificed all literary considerations to the one desire of pastoral usefulness. His voice was deep and sonorous, and his manner in the pulpit remarkably easy, dignified and self-possessed. He was singularly happy in seizing upon the passing events of the day, and giving them an ingenious and instructive application. Few men excelled him in enforcing the devotional and practical aspects of religion. When deeply moved by his subject, he became solemnly impressive. The late Dr. Henry Ware, of Boston, U.S., considered him, we have been told, to be the best preacher whom he had heard in England.

His religious views represented what is called the older phase of Unitarianism. In his estimate of the

external evidences of Christianity and of the authority of Scripture, he agreed, we believe, essentially with the able and learned men who formed and guided the public opinion of our churches in the early part of this century,—especially with the late Dr. Carpenter. But he thought for himself, and was no follower of a school. His religion had its source in the conscience and the heart, nursed there by a devout and habitual study of the Bible. With him religion was a principle of faith and life, resting on the broad and overt facts of human consciousness and experience. Philosophical systems and metaphysical theories he little cared to examine, for he thought that one only prepared the way for another. Indeed, abstract speculation was neither in accordance with his tastes nor particularly suited to his class of mental endowments. Yet there was a breadth and catholicity in his spirit, which at once fitted and disposed him to recognize the presence of sincere and availing religion under the most opposite forms of opinion. His was one of those kindly and genial natures, ever inclined to pass a favourable judgment and to look on the bright side of things, which are of inestimable service in periods of rapid transition, when antagonism is strong, and divergences run wide, for mediating between extreme parties, and bringing them to see the many precious truths which they still hold in common. Such a mind we have now lost. Such minds we can ill afford to lose. They have been taken from us with

a fearful rapidity of late. How shall we replace their calm, experienced wisdom, their ripe and scholarly judgment on questions of theology and the church, their social influence and courtesy, their gentle but earnest piety, their devout and tolerant charity? The memory which such minds leave behind them, is the richest tribute to their virtues. It is not shut up in a book, or attached to a world-wide name, but is a living power of strong and present action on the narrow circle of attached and sympathizing hearts that have known them and loved them; not raised aloft into the wide firmament of literary renown, like some distant, insulated star, worshipped from below with cold and joyless eye, but lingering still among survivors with a moral warmth and lustre which touches everything it rests upon with a hue of love—till the light that remains, and the lives that cherish it, grow dim and pale together, and all who have rejoiced and mourned with each other—all who have had common hopes and remembrances—on earth, are wrapped at length in the shade of a common oblivion—destined, as we trust, to awake again to mutual recognition on the morning of that brighter day whose sun shall go down no more. T.

DISCOURSES.

GOOD TIDINGS DESERVING OF A GLAD WELCOME: A Christmas-day Sermon.

Luke ii. 10. AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT; FOR BEHOLD, I BRING UNTO YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE.

"GOOD tidings of great joy." The words have a cheerful sound, and are well fitted to a cheerful season. They well express also the true character of Christianity. Ill indeed would they suit a religion of sadness and terror; and not much in harmony are they with some representations given, under the name of Christian doctrine, of the Divine character, and of human nature. But beautifully are they adapted to a religion proclaiming a Father in heaven for all mankind, and a Saviour for all, provided by that Father's great love and tender mercy.

"Good tidings of great joy." Yes, most appro-

priately might so be announced a religion which was to furnish suitable and full exercise for every good and useful capacity in man; and which, while elevating and ennobling his whole moral nature, was to be thoroughly compatible with his highest advances and his greatest enjoyments, as an intellectual and social being.

The announcement is represented as made, not to an assembly of the wealthy and powerful, or of the wise and learned, but to "shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night:"—that is, in fact, to persons who belonged to the poorer and more numerous classes of society—to those whose ordinary lot was one of toil, and who might, occasionally, have to struggle with hardship and privation. In this respect, too, there was a suitableness to a religion which, while freely offering its benefits to all, yet had a special regard to those who are likely always to form a large majority of mankind: a religion which was to teach the great lesson, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;"—and which, while enjoining the virtues closely connected with the best means of improving the outward condition, was to awaken also a desire of those true riches, that wealth of the mind and heart, which no mere inferiority of worldly station must necessarily hinder men from acquiring.

Such we believe to be the religion of Jesus.—We believe that he was born to be the Saviour of men,

by rescuing them from the dominion of every evil and hurtful disposition. We believe that he was sent "through the tender mercy of our God," as "a day-spring from on high," "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." We believe that, to fit him for accomplishing this purpose, the spirit of wisdom and of power was given to him without measure; and that thus he was the Christ, or anointed, of God. We believe that he is constituted "Head over all things to his church," entitled to the obedience of every human soul, and empowered to bestow everlasting life on all who obey him; and that thus he is Lord.

But we confess him Lord, as we confess him the Christ and the Saviour "to the glory of God the Father." We recognise, in all that he did and in all that he promised, the Father's loving kindness and tender mercy. We recognise, in the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, the free and fatherly gifts of the God who sent him. We find between God and Christ no diversity of purpose or disposition towards men. We find not the one issuing a wrathful decree to condemn, and the other interposing to prevent or limit its execution. We find God Himself "not willing that any should perish," and, therefore, sending His Son Jesus to "bless men by turning them from their iniquities." We find not Christ reconciling God unto the world, but "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

In a word, the love of God to men we find in all the love which Jesus manifested. In all the attractive, mild, and cheering light which beams forth from the Saviour, we recognise "the brightness of the Father's glory." In all the affectionate and encouraging words which we hear from the Son, we recognise the language also of the Father's mercy. And in the whole of that moral and religious dispensation, which was introduced through the "author and finisher of our faith," we are sure that we have a Divinely appointed and powerful means of promoting both the present and the everlasting happiness of human beings.

Believing this of the religion which the Christ of God came to teach and exemplify, we can perceive how suitably, as well as beautifully, his birth might be announced in the words, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." They were tidings in which men are deeply interested, as intellectual, moral, social, religious, and immortal beings. They relate to truths which will furnish the noblest exercise to the mental powers, supply the strongest and most animating motives to upright, benevolent, and holy conduct, mingle the sweetest hopes and consolations with the joys and sorrows of the social affections, direct the feelings of veneration and devotion to an object well fitted to make them sources of spiritual strength and gladness, and fill the whole prospect of futurity with brightness and beauty. They were tidings, too, in which the great mass of mankind—

that large proportion of them whose lot, in every age and country, has been, and seems likely to continue, one of much toil, with little recompense of this world's wealth—may especially be considered as deeply interested. For they relate to truths, by the right application of which may be imparted a dignity to existence, and its necessary occupations; a charm to social, friendly, and domestic relations; a glory to the outward scene, and a peace to the inward heart, independently of worldly rank or worldly riches.

But the words of the text deserve our attention, not only as a beautifully suitable announcement of the event to which they refer, but as suggesting the propriety of commemorating it in a cheerful and gladsome spirit. "Good tidings of great joy" surely deserve a corresponding welcome. The angel, who thus announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of the Saviour, implied that gladness was what that event was peculiarly fitted to awaken. He virtually proclaimed the season of its occurrence to be one of joy, and may be said, by anticipation, to have sanctioned, through all ages, a joyful commemoration of it.

Such a commemoration of it, probably, first originated in a feeling of that propriety to which I have alluded—a feeling that a glad and festive celebration was due to an event connected with so much that is cheering to human affections and human hopes—a feeling that the birth of him who came to be the friend of man, and to invite man to peace

and friendship with God, ought to be kept in remembrance and honour by a time when, by rejoicing together, men might also strengthen the bonds of mutual kindness and amity.

The custom of celebrating the anniversary of the Saviour's birth as a festival, would appear to have arisen before men had learned to think of the religion introduced by him as of a gloomy and unsocial character. It would appear to have arisen when Christians thought it quite possible to be religious, and, at the same time, cheerful and kindly—quite possible to please God, while innocently rejoicing with their fellow-men. And, perhaps, the opposition which in later times has been made to the custom, especially by those who have adopted or inclined to what may be called the Calvinistic system of theology, may have proceeded, if, in part, from a conscientious fear of countenancing superstitious and hurtful, or at least unauthorised usages, yet in part also, and no small part, from the morose and melancholy spirit which has not seldom insinuated itself into the bosoms of religious professors.

Be this, however, as it may, a day virtually repeating every year the announcement, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy," and every year proclaiming as the suitable and intended effect of these tidings, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men,"—appears to deserve a corresponding joyfulness of welcome: while the event itself, which it commemorates, is abundantly fitted

to suggest ideas such as may tend to keep within due bounds, and temper with a devout and thankful spirit, the social festivities of the season.

Yes; it is a natural time for neighbours, friends, families, to rejoice together. It is a natural time for parents, in the midst of their assembled children, and for brothers and sisters, then, perhaps, after long separation, once more meeting together, to let their hearts flow out to one another in affectionate gladness.

But, then, it is also a natural time for that gladness to take its character from the holy and benevolent spirit of the religion, introduced by that event which the season commemorates. It is a time not only for innocent mirth with those whom we love, not only for interchanging with them expressions and offices of kindness,—but for calling to mind the reverence and care which we owe to the intellectual and moral capacities of their nature, and the unspeakably important directions which our kindness may take, in helping them forward to "glory, honour, and immortality." When the professed occasion of our rejoicing is the birth of Him who came to be the Saviour from sin, and to bring life and immortality to light, surely in the midst of our joy should be remembered the common interest which we have in pursuing together the things which tend to moral and religious improvement, and the boundless career which is laid open to us, as those who may for ever be companions in a holy

and blessed progress. It is a time for thinking not only of all that our friends and kindred are to us now, but of all that they may be to us, as well as of all that we may be to them, for ever. It is a time, therefore, for considering afresh how we are using our various means of influencing them, what impressions we are making on them, by our mode of treating them, by our conversation, by our whole example.

I can conceive a peculiar and exquisite delight imparted to the meetings of friends and families at such a season, by the thought, that the affections in which there is so much that is pure and holy, as well as pleasant, are not a mere transient brightness of a scene which is liable to many changes, and soon to have its brief day made dark with night,—but that they are a light, rather, belonging to an inheritance which shall never fade away. I can conceive the gladness with which we find ourselves surrounded by beings whom we love, to be unspeakably heightened by the conviction, that every good and amiable quality which we observe in them belongs to a part of their nature, over which decay and death shall have no power. We have thus a glorious hope to set against the question which may occur in hours when we seem richest in social and domestic blessings; "how know we that this affectionate circle will ever again be around us? that this friendly and pleasant meeting will ever again be repeated?"—It may not on earth; and yet those

who may, on the future recurrence of such occasions, be regretted as absent, need not be mourned as lost. The number may still be reckoned the same to the eye of God, though lessened to the eye of man. The dead may still be reckoned as living, and only waiting for those who, for a while, are left behind, in order to renew, and for ever, the interchange of kindness which was hallowed by faith in Christ and piety to God.

Oh! blessed indeed were the tidings, and fitted to awaken a deep, religious joy, which announced the birth of one, who was to bring life and immortality to light—who was to make that future existence certain, in which there had ever been in the human heart so strong a tendency to hope—and who was himself to be for ever a proof and a pledge to man, that the grave shall have no lasting victory, and that death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed.

But the joyfulness of our welcome to such tidings as those which announced our Saviour's birth, should also take part of its character from the far reaching benevolence and compassion of his mission. However innocent, however holy may be the pleasure which we derive from an interchange of kind affections and offices with our friends and families—however that pleasure may be accompanied with the earnest desire and purpose to help them forward, by every means in our power, in the way of righteousness and peace;—this is not enough as a fit celebration of a season, which commemorates the birth

of Him who came to teach men the lesson of their universal brotherhood—to teach them their duty of living not only to themselves, even in the sense of living to their own continual improvement, not only to those who stand in near and dear relations to them, in a like sense of consulting and pursuing their greatest and most lasting good;—but to those also, who, however separated from them by their worldly condition, and removed from their ordinary walks of life, may yet be within the reach of their ability to instruct, to assist, to cheer, to comfort.

Our welcome to the day which commemorates the birth of such a Teacher, should surely be accompanied with some consideration of the question, how we are practising his great lesson of benevolence and compassion to those of our fellow-men who are in sorrow, need, or any other adversity. Our rejoicing in the good tidings of which the day repeats the announcement, should be mingled with the desire to make others, if we can, partake in our joy. In the midst of our own social and domestic blessings, we should remember those whose lot is one of privation and hardship. In our thankfulness for our own moral and religious advantages, we should remember those who, though the light is shining around them, have not yet had the cloud removed from their minds which hides from them its beautiful and comfortable beams. "To do good and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased:" and again, "Remember the words of the

Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive:"—are exhortations fitly claiming some portion of our attention, on a day which we profess to keep as a day of rejoicing for the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. And amidst the innocent cheerfulness and festivity of the day, we shall be preparing a still sweeter and holier delight for some future time, if we set ourselves seriously to consider what works of mercy there are in which we can take part, or a larger and more active part than hitherto, perhaps, we have done. We are near enough to the close of one year to lay our plans for the next; and the day which commemorates the Saviour's birth, is a fit day for plans of new or increased exertions in the Saviour's holy and benevolent service.

Let me observe, too, that this is a mode of welcoming the day in which they can join, who have too many sad recollections of change and bereavement to feel towards it as a festive season. It comes not to them as a day of earthly joy; for it reminds them of happy days that on earth can return no more. It gathers not around them the friendly circle which once made it a day of gladness; for death has been busy in that circle. But even their sadness may feel in it a power to soothe and cheer with a holy comfort, as well as to inspire a holy strength for purposes and works of mercy. The day has its good tidings for them in the hope which it encourages them to mingle with their sorrow, as well as its profitable

suggestions in the benevolent purposes for which it bids them more than ever live. In fact, the day can never find the humble and faithful disciples of Jesus in circumstances such as will altogether unfit them to welcome its tidings. It may find them in adversity. It may find them in sorrow. It may find them in sickness. It may find them drawing nigh to the hour of death. But there will still be an important sense in which it will be heard by them, as repeating the same language: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." For it will remind them of Him who has made it sure that adversity, sorrow, sickness, death itself, can only work out good to those who keep themselves in the love of God.

May we so keep ourselves; and thus, in whatever circumstances of earthly joy or sorrow the day, as year after year it returns, may find us, may our hearts be prepared with suitable welcome to its tidings of the Saviour, and of the grace and truth which came by him from our heavenly Father.

And now, my fellow-Christians, in conclusion, let me offer you my hearty wishes for your well-being, both temporal and spiritual. May God's blessing be on all the cheerful meetings of friends and relatives which will take place among you this day. And if some of you, in such meetings, cannot but think of those who can no longer take their former place in them—if distance or death now divides any who, at this season, used to gather around the festive board, —yet may those who are left remember Him whose

presence extends to all lands and to all worlds, and in the assurance of His watchful care and fatherly protection over both the present and the absent, and over both the living and the dead, may they still feel in communion of spirit with all whom they miss from the circle that their eyes look round upon. Where also separation and bereavements have been too recent to permit any joyous celebration of the season, and where sickness and suffering, with their attendant anxieties, are casting their shadow over the home, still may there be firm trust in God, and quiet waiting for the issue of His appointments, and a large experience of that peace which is promised to those whose hearts are stayed on Him. Every where among you may there be some influence of that faith and hope, which he whose birth we this day celebrate came to make the blessed and abiding portion of the human soul. Where there is joy, may these influences keep it pure and innocent. Where there is grief, may like influences be its healing balm. In all your homes, and in all your hearts, may there be, to mingle with every other brightness, and to soften every gloom, the light of that day-spring from on high which, through the tender mercy of God, hath visited us. In all of you, whatever be your respective circumstances, may there be an abundant experience such as will dispose you thankfully to acknowledge, that they were indeed good tidings which Jesus Christ brought from God to man.

Such are my wishes for you, my fellow-Christians,

and of a like friendly kind, I will hope, are yours for me. May God fulfil all that He knows to be best of what we can desire for one another. May He keep ever shining upon us all the light of His Fatherly countenance, and give us peace, both now and evermore! Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE CROSS.

Good Friday.

AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME.—John xii. 32.

"THIS he said," adds the Evangelist, "signifying what death he should die"; a death of suffering and ignominy—a death in which he was to be lifted up on a cross, and exposed to public gaze and insult. If so, our Lord would appear to have looked forward to his death itself, in such circumstances, as one means of really establishing and extending his power over the minds and hearts of men. No doubt he might also have in view the additional and powerful testimony which, after that event, would be borne to his Divine mission and claims by his resurrection from the dead, as well as by the spirit poured out on his Apostles, inciting and enabling them to teach and preach boldly in his name. But as we find one great subject of their preaching to have been Christ crucified, no less than Christ risen from the dead—as we

find them making repeated and fervent reference, more or less express, to his sufferings and death;—we may well suppose that our Lord alluded also to the moral power of contemplations directed to such a subject, as part of the means by which he was to draw all men unto him. And in this supposition we seem farther warranted by what he had already said in connection with the assurance (ver. 23) that the hour was come "in which the Son of man should be glorified." In immediate continuation we read the words, (ver. 24) "verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here our Lord surely speaks as if his death itself were to be largely instrumental in accomplishing the purposes of his mission, as if it were to be like the dropping into the ground of the seed from which the harvest is to arise;—as if, in a word, the fact of his death, received into the mind and heart of man, were necessarily to be the germ of an abundant and valuable moral produce. It seems only natural to understand him, as still having some reference to the moral power and attractiveness of his death itself, in the words which so soon follow: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

And to me, it appears that there is such a power and attractiveness in the death of Jesus, when seriously contemplated. The effect of so contemplating it, I would now make the subject of discourse.

In any case, the closing scene of a human being is one which gathers around it a deep and solemn interest. If he be an entire stranger, yet we cannot witness with unconcern the manner in which he prepares himself for, and looks forward to, his mysterious change. If he be even one whose past conduct has given us much offence, we cannot retain all our angry feelings against him, we cannot resist a degree of sympathy with him, when we behold him about to close his eyes for ever on the light of this present world. There is something in his situation which awes, subdues, and softens our hearts, especially if his deportment appear to us becoming the solemn occasion. However far apart he may have been from us in life, we feel, as we look upon him in his dying hour, some ties of a common nature and a common destiny.

But how much deeper does the interest become, when the shades of death are fast descending upon one, whose course of life has been full of virtues which we have known, and of kindness which we have experienced! With how much additional reverence do we look upon the wise and good, when we know that soon we shall behold them no more; and especially, when we see them preserving to the end the same high and holy principles, the same trust in God and benevolent concern for man, which have distinguished them through life! And if, perchance, we have failed in our duties to them—if we have sometimes been ungrateful and unjust,—neg-

lecting their counsels and disparaging their conduct, —if we have sometimes, in our hastiness and waywardness, given occasion and advantage against them to their detractors and opponents;—how likely is the hour which is about to remove them from us, to awaken in us a keen sense of the wrong which we have done them, and an earnest resolution to make what compensation we can for that wrong, by the honour and veneration with which we will hold them in remembrance.

Some feelings of this kind, probably, were not long in being stirred among those who stood as spectators around the cross of Jesus. Already even then might be commencing a fulfilment of his words, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." For we read (Luke xxiii. 48) that "all the people which came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned." Among those who gave this sign of sorrow were, not improbably, some who had helped to bring on the event which they now lamented—some who had swelled with their voices the loud and savage cry which prevailed against Jesus—some who had joined in the scornful words, "he saved others, himself he cannot save", or in the mocking invitation, "if thou be the son of God, come down from the cross." But they had witnessed the mild, yet dignified and invincible patience of the sufferer; they had heard his words of compassionate and forgiving intercession for his persecutors, and promise to one of

his companions in suffering, of affectionate thoughtfulness for his grieving and desolate mother, of trusting resignation to the will of his heavenly Father: and then, perhaps, had arisen in their minds recollections of deeds and words during his life-time, in beautiful harmony with the mingled gentleness, benevolence, piety, and majesty of his dying hour—recollections of his blameless and holy character, against which his enemies had in vain sought matter of accusation—recollections of the wisdom to which they had often wonderingly and gladly listened, and which had forced even from unwilling lips the confession, "never man spake like this man"—recollections of the mighty and merciful works which, in so many instances, had left thankfulness and joy where he had found suffering and sorrow. Thoughts and recollections of this kind were likely enough to rise up in the minds of many who stood around the cross of Jesus, and combining with what they witnessed of his demeanour in that last and awful hour, might well dispose them, independently of the darkness and the earthquake (which seemed to betoken a horror of universal nature, at the guilt of his destroyers) to retire in grief and dismay from the scene, as well as to carry with them a deep impression of the conviction—"certainly this was a righteous man," "this was the Son of God."

There can, I should think, be little doubt, that the manner in which Jesus met his death, began a preparation for the eagerness of attention and rapidity

of conversion which soon after followed, when the apostles, revived from their first deep dejection by their Lord's resurrection, and strengthened by that power from on high, which, in fulfilment of his promise, they received, openly proclaimed at Jerusalem that "God had made that same Jesus, who had been crucified, both Lord and Christ." They spoke to hearers, many of whom had not forgotten the scene of the crucifixion, or the feelings there awakened. They spoke to hearts which had already been softened into sorrow for the wrong there done to the innocent sufferer, and which were, therefore, prepared to answer the earnest appeal of the apostles with the humble inquiry, "men and brethren, what shall we do?"

The impression likely to have been made, and which we have so much reason for believing to have been actually made by the death of Jesus, on many who witnessed that event, is, in some respects, similar to that which now also, it seems to me, must often be left, after reading attentively the simple records of the different Evangelists. At least, my own experience is, that no writer about Christianity, no advocate of its truth, however able and eloquent, no interpreter of its doctrines, however learned and ingenious, ever so thoroughly convinces, or so deeply moves me, as Jesus himself, in the glimpses which I catch of his character, the hints which I gather of his lessons, and the breathings which I feel of his spirit, in the pages of his Evangelists. And when

I there place myself with him at the last supper, listening to his parting instructions; or in the garden of Gethsemane, beholding his agony, and at the same time, his resignation; or in the hall of the high-priest, observing his mild deportment when surrounded by his accusers; or at the judgment-seat of Pilate, admiring the wisdom and the dignity which compelled even his judge to become a witness in his favour; or in the procession to the place of crucifixion, hearing from him his words of tenderness and pity to the daughters of Jerusalem; or at the foot of the cross, looking up to him in the midst of the sufferings and insults which he was enduring, and having revealed to me in every word which he uttered, the undying character of his benevolence and his piety,—I feel what helps me to understand how, in part at least, the prediction may be continually receiving its fulfilment, "I, when I shall be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Yes; and if men would but more frequently give themselves up unrestrainedly to the influences of a contemplation directed to Jesus, as he appears in the simple narratives of his earliest historians—if they would trust less to others and more to themselves for learning what they ought to think of him —if they would care less about reconciling every particular of their religious belief, or their religious affections, with the theological systems of this or that party—if, in a word, they would take their Chris-

tianity from Christ himself,—I cannot but think that they would much more frequently feel the great moral power and attractiveness which there is, not only in his general spirit and example, but more especially in the deep pathos of the circumstances connected with his death.

But, beyond the hold which these circumstances are fitted to take of our tenderest and most reverential feelings, there cannot but be a deep impression made by the contemplation of Jesus in his sufferings and death, not only of his perfect patience, benevolence, and piety, but of his perfect sincerity in all that he had claimed respecting his commission and authority from God,—his perfect sincerity also in the conviction, that, by submitting to death, he should confer a greater blessing on the world, as well as more completely accomplish the merciful purposes of his heavenly Father, than by choosing a course of more immediate ease and honour to himself. Such a course, for any thing that appears in his history, he might have chosen, and that, too, without forsaking what would have been accounted a path of great usefulness and excellence. He might, for instance, have remained in Nazareth and the surrounding district, at a safe distance from the jealousy and enmity of the chief priests and rulers at Jerusalem. In this peaceful retirement he might have imparted his instructions to the simple and affectionate hearts which he had won by his benefits. He might have lived in the midst of gratitude, esteem, confidence,

and love, every day doing some good to men and rejoicingly communing with God. He might have lived so that, had any record afterwards remained of him, it would still have been an interesting and instructive memorial of a good and blessed life. Or if he had desired a more conspicuous stage for the exercise of his powers, and, at the same time, a more ample scope for the gratification of his benevolent inclinations, he might have found it, so far as we can perceive, without coming so directly into collision with the prejudices of his age and nation. He might have continued to go through the whole land, teaching in the synagogues many noble and salutary truths, and securing attention to his instructions by deeds of compassion and mercy, without appearing to be other than a prophet and reformer, zealous to carry out into full operation the true spirit of the Mosaic law. He might have so spoken and so acted as to have had the chief priests and rulers themselves among his supporters, and through their influence to have swayed the mind and heart of the whole nation for purposes connected with the general improvement and welfare. Nay, he might have awakened an enthusiasm in his behalf that would have borne him on to the establishment of a kingdom, such as was so generally imagined and expected for the Messiah. And in this way he might have been the revered and honoured deliverer and benefactor of his nation, as well as their moral and religious instructor.

But his mission was not to that nation only. The views and purposes of his benevolence extended to all countries and all times. And a deep impression was on his mind from the beginning, that his way to the accomplishment of the work for which he was sent, was through suffering and death. Therefore he chose and persisted in that way. He who wrought so many miracles for others, wrought not one to save himself. He who knew that the Father always heard him, spoke not the word which would have brought legions of angels to his rescue. "Thus it was written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer," were thoughts that reconciled him to all which he had to endure. He laid down his life a willing sacrifice for the general good of the human race. His death was the crowning testimony to the extent of his benevolence, as well as to the veracity of his assertions, and his unbounded trust in God.

When so contemplated, how can it but draw us in gratitude and affection to him? There is not a single human being who, when he reads the affecting narrative of the crucifixion, and all the circumstances which preceded and attended it, may not say, "that mild and patient sufferer endured all this for me." Yes; he endured it for every member of that great family, the general and everlasting welfare of which, and not the glory or prosperity of one particular people, was the object which he had in view. He suffered and died, because he chose rather to be the instructor, benefactor and friend of all times and all

nations, than the mere deliverer and protector, however honoured and triumphant, of his own country.

But there would be something to counteract, as it seems to me, the moral power and attractiveness of the Saviour's death, if we might not also contemplate in it a proof of benevolent and merciful purposes on the part of the God who sent him. There would be something to put clouds and darkness around the cross of Jesus, if we must suppose the least variance of disposition to men between him and his heavenly Father—if we must consider what he endured rather as necessary to appease Divine wrath, than as instrumental to the wider exercise of Divine love. Jesus himself, however, intimates no such variance between his own disposition to men, and that of his Father. On various occasions he attributes his mission, and all that he was to do in fulfilment of it, to God's love for men. And in the text, his language is not that of one who thought of God as the party on whom his death was to exert any influence, or in whom it was to produce any change: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me." In the human mind and heart did he, apparently, expect the power and efficacy of his death to be felt.

Conformable to these representations and intimations of the master, is the following language of the disciple: "God," says the apostle Paul, "commendeth His own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;" again, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself:" and

again, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" In like manner the apostle John says,—"In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

Surely it is only in strict accordance with such passages, to contemplate in the death of Christ a proof of God's great love for men, together with his own, and to find in it a reason for trust in the most fatherly forgiveness and mercy of God, as well as for gratitude and affection to him who was willing to suffer and die, that God's merciful purposes might be more readily and extensively accomplished.

Such are the thoughts which have occurred to me on the power and attractiveness of our Lord's death. I commend them to your serious consideration. And I would advise you to connect with the consideration of them, an attentive perusal of all that the different Evangelists have recorded, in relation to the closing scene of our Lord's earthly existence. It is a custom, transmitted from very ancient times, and still honoured by a large portion of the Christian Church, to observe certain seasons and days in particular commemoration of the principal occurrences so recorded. I say nothing against such observances, which may be, and I doubt not, often are, attended with spiritual benefit. But I will say, that it must be still more profitable to have the events

themselves thus commemorated, at all times deeply impressed upon our minds. So, too, it is thought by many, and once was much more extensively thought, a pious and edifying usage, to wear a cross as a visible badge of the Christian profession. Neither do I say anything against this usage, of which Protestants have sometimes, perhaps, been superstitious in their abhorrence. But I do say, that it is exceedingly important to act in the spirit of the reason once given for the discontinuance of the practice; the reason was this, "we have transferred the cross from our garments to our hearts."

May God grant that in our hearts may be felt the power of the Cross, to draw us on in gratitude, love, and obedience to himself, and His blessed Son! Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

THE SEPULCHRE IN THE GARDEN.*

Easter Day.

NOW IN THE PLACE WHERE HE WAS CRUCIFIED, THERE WAS A GARDEN; AND IN THE GARDEN A NEW SEPULCHRE, WHEREIN WAS NEVER MAN YET LAID.—John xix. 41.

A GARDEN and a grave:—this is a combination of two things usually suggestive of very different ideas. The one is connected in our minds with pleasant thoughts and sunny recollections. The other is more frequently associated with gloom, and sadness, and mystery. A garden, especially at this season of the year, is a scene in which we expect to be cheered with the sight of renewed bloom, verdure, and beauty. A grave reminds us of the change and decay which must inevitably come upon all the brightness and glory of man's earthly condition. In the garden we may sometimes forget, while admir-

* This Sermon was preached by Mr. Robberds on Easter Sunday, April 16th, 1854; his death occurring on the morning of the following Friday.

ing the curious and delicate handiwork of nature, for how short a time what we are looking upon is destined to endure. But a grave directly and forcibly admonishes us, both that "the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away," and that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass." Nevertheless, among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it was not unusual for the garden to be also a place of burial. By the laws of their land, in this respect far in advance of modern civilization, it was not allowed to inter the dead within less than 2,000 cubits of any city. And with respect to Jerusalem, not even gardens, except in a very few instances, were permitted within the walls. They were laid out, accordingly, and, as appears from the Jewish historian Josephus, in considerable numbers, on the outside of the city, occupying a large portion of the surrounding district. Hence it might easily happen, that the owners of such gardens, if they wished to make sepulchres for themselves and their families, would do so on the allotments of land which already belonged to them. And thus the scene of quiet retirement and recreation for the living, would become also, in frequent instances, the resting place for the dead.

We can imagine, too, that other reasons, arising out of very natural feelings, would combine to recommend, if they did not altogether originate, this practice. The garden which, day after day, and year after year, had been the resort for calm enjoyment

and peaceful meditation, would seem to have claims to be the chosen spot for receiving the remains of its former visitor. And they who best loved him would feel the scenes which he delighted to frequent in his lifetime, endeared and hallowed rather than rendered less attractive, by still containing his sepulchre.

This would be more especially the case among the more virtuous and devout of the dwellers in Jerusalem. They knew enough of God from the sacred books of their nation, to give them a firm trust in the Guardian and Shepherd of Israel. And though life and immortality were not yet fully brought to light, the hope appears to have been very extensively and confidently entertained, that there would be a resurrection from the dead. They had, therefore, the elements of a faith which was sufficient to prevent the idea of death from being necessarily repulsive to their minds. They could bear to have the memorials of it presented to them even in their pleasant places. They could find delight in a garden, even though in the garden there was a sepulchre.

Indeed, why should they not?—For the pious Jew could say with the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." He could say with the patriarch Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." He could also say, with the prophet Isaiah: "He will swallow

up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."

Of such a character, in particular, appears to have been the individual who had prepared the garden-sepulchre, in which the body of Jesus was laid. We learn from all four Evangelists, that it was Joseph of Arimathea, and we gather from various incidental notices that he was a good and righteous man, "waiting for the kingdom of God," and himself a disciple of Jesus. He it was to whom the garden belonged, and who had in that garden "a new sepulchre, which he had hewn out of the rock." He had prepared it, probably, with the expectation that it would some time be the resting-place of his own remains. And to such a character as his, we can imagine that there would be nothing repulsive in the thought of finally reposing from the business and cares of life, amidst the same quiet scenes to which he was in the habit of retreating from the noise of the city, and the fatigues of the day.

Little did this good man think, that the first occupant of this garden-grave would be the great conqueror of death, and establisher of that heavenly kingdom for which he was waiting. Little did he think, even when he was helping to lay there the body of Jesus, that from this very sepulchre would burst forth a light of hope, which, through all succeeding generations, would, to the disciple of Jesus, become a sunshine for the dark valley itself.

The only reason alleged by the Evangelist, why

the body of Jesus was deposited in the sepulchre of Joseph, is, that it was nigh at hand. And this, probably, was the principal, if not only motive which influenced the individuals concerned. But had they acted with the greatest possible deliberation, they could hardly have chosen, for the lifeless form of Jesus, a more suitable resting place than one surrounded by the quiet and cheerful scenery of a garden. Through all his life, he appears to have had a delight in being amidst the works of God. In them, doubtless, he had himself read those instructive lessons, and heard those encouraging voices, with respect to the kind and providential care of his Heavenly Father, to which he bade his disciples listen. The grass on which he walked or reclined, the flowers with which the fields around him were enamelled, the trees that refreshed him with their shade and their fruit, have, in a manner, inwrought themselves into his discourses. His words, if we may so speak, often breathe forth the freshness and the fragrance of the vineyard, the olive-mount, the cornfield, and the garden. Nay, a garden "over the brook Cedron" is expressly mentioned, as a place to which "Jesus often resorted with his disciples." That same garden was the scene of his bitter agony, his earnest prayers, and the strong consolation which he received in answer to them. How suitable it seems that, after his last pang of suffering was over, and the whole of his arduous work, including so much both of endurance and exertion, was finished,

—his worn-out frame should be laid to rest where the calm majesty of the starry heavens would keep watch over him by night, and the "*silent hymns*" of flowers and trees would be ascending around him to his God and Father, throughout the day.

Still more appropriate, as the burial place of Jesus, does that garden-sepulchre appear, when we consider the hopes with which he has enabled us to contemplate death. Hopes, indeed, to some extent, in connection with such a contemplation, would almost seem to be natural in man. In proportion as his moral powers and his kind affections have been brought into exercise,—in proportion as his own character has given a dignity to life, and the virtues of those whom he loved have made their existence precious in his estimation;—he has been fain to believe that death is not the destruction of the whole human being. His heart, in opposition to the most positive testimony of his senses, has rejected the dreary idea that the body's destiny is also that of the mind. He has refused to believe that what he no longer sees, hears, or can touch, must, therefore, have utterly ceased to be. He has clung to the possibility of there being something in man, which is not subject to the power of death, which does not go down into the grave, or, at least, does not perish there, does not become irrecoverably mingled with the general elements of matter.—Thus it was in the heathen world. Here and there a philosopher might doubt—an inquirer might be perplexed, and the

more in proportion to the continuance of his inquiries—a sensualist and profligate might resolve to disbelieve, and use the doubts and perplexities of the more serious to harden himself in his purpose;—but the mass, more faithful to the instincts of the heart, retained some form of belief in a future existence.—So, too, it was among the Jews. They read no distinct promise of a life to come in the writings of their great lawgiver. They could have no definite outlines of such a prospect amidst the splendid, but, with all their splendour, often obscure visions of their prophets. Yet, though there was a sect among them that denied a resurrection from the dead, the vast majority treated this denial as impious. Even if unable to give a reason for the hope that was in them, they fondly clung to that hope. And no wonder, when the hope itself is so strengthening to man in his holiest aims and exertions, so ennobling to his rank in the creation, so welcome to his affections, so comforting to his sorrows.—But on how much firmer a foundation does it rest in those who believe, that Jesus arose victorious over death from that sepulchre in which his body was laid; and who have so many plain words, of both himself and his apostles on record, to assure them that, as he rose, they shall rise also, yea, that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Surely when we consider this greater strength of hope and clearness of prospect, in regard to a future life, which we have through Christ—when we con-

sider how closely he has connected the idea of death with that of revival—how closely he has made the cheering light of the latter idea to follow the darkness of the former,—we have reason to consider, also, as peculiarly appropriate, the combination which, in his case, occurred between the grave and the garden. The garden is a scene in which the testimonies to the Divine power and wisdom are often of a most beautiful and delightful kind. Fit it was that, in such a scene, so glorious a proof of the Divine love should be given, as that which sealed the promise of immortality to all mankind. The garden is often a scene of the most wonderful resurrections in the natural world:—there it is, that the change from the bareness and dreariness of winter to the verdure and bloom of spring, is most striking:—there it is, that we are glad to welcome the re-appearing foliage and flowers of former seasons, like friends after a long absence. Fit it was that such a scene should be historically connected with the great event, which has given to death the aspect only of a winter to be surely followed by a glorious spring. Fit it was that the return of life and beauty to the earth should thus, through all succeeding generations of those who read and meditate believingly on our Lord's history, be at once a memorial of *his* resurrection and a presage of *their own.*

Without the faith which sees the glory of immortality shining through the shadows of the grave, the revival of nature in the fields and gardens, at this

season of the year, might sometimes be a melancholy spectacle for man. It might seem to him a sad contrast with the destiny awaiting himself, and all whom he loves. It might only awaken his regrets to think, that there is a return for the brightness and the beauty visible to the bodily eye, but no return for the pleasant hours and valued friendships which are so dear to the heart—that there is a spring for the grass and the flowers, but none for the virtues and affections of the human mind.

But with a faith in his own immortality—with a steadfast persuasion that all whom he has seen go down to the grave before him, have gone only to exchange one scene of conscious existence for another —he is prepared to behold in the re-appearance of life and beauty in the natural world, a cheering type of what shall take place, on a far grander scale, in the destinies of human beings. Whether he thinks of those who have been gathered from this present scene in a ripe old age, or of those who have been taken away in what seemed only the midst of their days, or of those whose still earlier removal was like that of flowers cut down while yet the dew of morning was upon them—he is still enabled to assure himself that the same Divine power which he sees causing the earth to bring forth her buds, and the garden, from the seeds that have been sown in it, to clothe itself anew with beauty, will also be exerted to make the grave give up its dead, and that which was sown in weakness grow up into immortal strength.

The frail nature and transient duration of all that is pleasant to the eye in the aspect of spring, have often furnished subjects of comparison with the short and uncertain existence of man. In the leaves of trees, fresh and fair for a brief season, but doomed before long to fade and disappear, has been seen a close resemblance to his successive generations. In the flower blooming for its little day, and an object of mingled solicitude and delight to its cultivator, but which no care can prevent from soon withering away, has been seen a likeness to what not seldom is the history of a human being—fondly and anxiously watched over by parental love, but liable, by disease or accident, to be snatched away from that love.

But it is a hint for more cheerful comparisons, which the believer in immortality will also gather from the appearance of the fields and gardens at this season of the year. The voice of spring bidding the tree to put forth its leaves, and the flowers to unfold their varied hues, will, to his ear, have a sound of still more gladsome import, as reminding him of the mighty voice which shall command even the dead to live, and be obeyed by all who have gone down to the grave. Yes; amidst all that is pleasant to the eye in the reviving beauty of the natural world, he will delight to remember that there is to be a time of far more glorious revival than this—that there is for man a land where—

"Everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers."

He will delight to think of death as only, for those whose hearts are right with God, a passage to that land. And that thought will be as a garden around the grave, to dispel what would otherwise be its cheerlessness and gloom.

Such thoughts should not be difficult, should not be unfrequent, where there is the Christian knowledge of God and hope of immortality. It should not be difficult for us, my fellow-Christians, and, surely it is desirable, to connect soothing and pleasing ideas with that of death. It should be quite possible for us to make this subject, from which men are so apt to shrink, not unwelcome to our minds in the midst of this world's fairest scenes and pleasantest seasons—to make it one on which we may meditate with pleasure as well as profit, not only in our times of sorrow and bereavement, but on our brightest days, and when all is fair and blooming around us.

But, in order to make death such a subject of contemplation, we must live under the practical influences of faith in God and in immortality. We must learn to spend every day as in His sight, and to look upon all our days here as having a close connection with our existence hereafter. We must, in short, treat the great doctrines which we profess to believe respecting the value of spiritual treasures and heavenly mansions, as realities. For one who does this —who is heartily convinced that his true "life is hidden with Christ in God," and who has his affections "set on things above, where Christ sitteth at

the right hand of God,"—for him who is so minded and so disposed, amidst all the changes and uncertainties of the present scene, there remains, fixed and unchanging, the assurance that they shall all work out good under the controlling guidance and fatherly Providence of God; and that death, come when it may, and how it may, will come exactly at the right time and in the right manner, for him whose will is in harmony with that of God.

Yes; this devotedness of the heart to God, this union in spirit with Him it is, which will not only keep us prepared for heaven, but, in a manner, bring down the peace and serenity of heaven to lie around us, even here on earth. This it is, which, like the genial influence of spring in the natural world, will be continually bringing out fresh life and beauty from the world of the human heart. And this it is, which will make the grave seem but as a quiet resting-place, amidst the sunshine of God's presence, and the tokens of His Fatherly love—like the garden-sepulchre of Jesus:—like that, too, to be surely succeeded by a glorious resurrection.

God grant that we may all, whether young or old, be continually making progress in the important and blessed work of giving up our hearts to Him, and bringing our desires into unison with His holy will. —Amen.

DISCOURSE IV.

THOUGHTS ON OUR LORD'S ASCENSION.

Sunday after Ascension-day.

SO THEN AFTER THE LORD HAD SPOKEN UNTO THEM, HE WAS RECEIVED UP INTO HEAVEN, AND SAT ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.—Mark xvi. 19.

THE two portions of Scripture which have been read in this morning's service (Mark xvi. 14—20. Acts i. 1—14) have been appropriated in the book of Common Prayer to the commemoration of our Lord's ascension. And this is called in the same book the Sunday after Ascension-day: the day so named itself having been last Thursday.

There can be little doubt that the custom of commemorating particular events in our Lord's wonderful history, originated in natural and good feelings. There can be as little doubt that, whatever superstition there may have sometimes been in the mode of observing such seasons, or in the opinion of their peculiar sanctity, they may be made subservient to the very useful purpose of drawing especial attention

to the events so commemorated. They may help to carry us back in imagination to the age and scenes in which the great Author and Finisher of our faith appeared, to place us in his company during his ministry on earth, and to give us visions of his glory in the heaven to which he was raised up.

And certainly, if any events in our Lord's history are deserving of having days set apart for their especial remembrance, his ascension has a claim to be reckoned one of them. It is, at least, equal in importance to his birth, his death, and his resurrection. From it, indeed, may be said to date the relation which he now holds to his church, as a spiritual community of which he is the exalted head. It is our assurance that he lives to be for ever "a prince and a saviour," and that God has given him power to be the "author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him." "He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

In these words of our text the general fact only of our Lord's ascension and exaltation is asserted. Nothing is said of the time, the manner, or any of the circumstances in which his disappearance from this present world took place. Nor do we find even the fact itself directly mentioned by more than one other of the Evangelists. Matthew and John have not included it in their narratives. Yet both have recorded expressions of our Lord, which could only be realised by its occurrence. Matthew has represented him as saying to his apostles, after his resur-

rection, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and again, "lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:"—as if he were thenceforth to be associated with God in the government and protection of his church; which is also the meaning of his being seated on the right hand of God. And John has represented him as, both before and after his resurrection, plainly referring to his approaching ascension. Thus in one of his discourses to his disciples, shortly before his crucifixion, we find the words, as recorded by this Evangelist, "I came forth from the Father, I am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." And farther on in the same record we find him, after he had risen, giving this commission to Mary Magdalene, "go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God."

In the writings of the apostle Paul, too, occur expressions which could only arise from his assured conviction of the fact asserted by the evangelist Mark in our text: one passage may suffice as a specimen, and is, at the same time, interesting as a grand amplification of the truth more briefly set forth in the Evangelist's words. It is that in which the Apostle, writing to the Ephesians (ch. i. 20—23) speaks of God's mighty working, "which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand, in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and

might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Such language of one who was miraculously called by Jesus Christ himself to the office of an apostle, would have been sufficient evidence for the general fact of our Lord's ascension, even if no express record of the manner in which it took place had come down to us. But a friend and companion of the apostle Paul, who professes also to have drawn up his narrative from the information furnished by those "who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," has given us, in two separate writings, some minute particulars of the event which our text so very briefly mentions. The evangelist Luke, in the conclusion of his gospel, after detailing some of our Lord's instructions to the eleven apostles, goes on to say, "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." The same writer, in the commencement of his other work, the book of Acts, gives us a still more detailed account of the same occurrence, from which we learn that it took place forty days after the resurrection, on Mount Olivet (which was in the immediate neighbourhood of Bethany), and in the

presence of the apostles. It is distinctly stated that "while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." It is added, that "while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Here is a degree of particularity as to time and place, and number of witnesses, which not only is itself a strong presumption for the reality of the occurrence, but very much helps us also to set the whole scene before us. We can imagine something of the mild and holy love which would beam from the countenance of our Lord, as he lifted up his hands and gave his parting benediction to his disciples. We can imagine something of their astonishment and awe, as they beheld him rising from the midst of them, and borne up towards heaven. We feel how natural it was that, even after a cloud had received him out of their sight, they should still continue steadfastly gazing upwards, watching if, perchance, they might catch one glimpse more of their beloved Lord. We can picture to ourselves the eagerness of attention which they would give to the assurance, that he should so come in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven. We can imagine the solemn thoughtfulness, the serious and devout

joy with which they would return to Jerusalem, there to wait, as he had charged them, for the promised descent of the Holy Spirit, to commune with one another on the wonderful occurrence which they had witnessed, to meditate on the new views which it opened of the kingdom to be established by their Lord, and to continue with one accord in prayer and supplication.

Deep on the minds of those who witnessed it, must have been the impression of such a scene as that of our Lord's ascension. But not without impression ought to be the fact itself, when made a subject of serious consideration, that our Lord was "received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

1. It is a fact which ought to keep us in mind, as, probably, it helped to convince the apostles, that the kingdom which he came to establish is altogether of a spiritual nature. They had only just before asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Even his resurrection from the dead had not, it would seem, opened their understandings to views of a greater and more enduring glory for him than that of earthly triumphs, and earthly dominion. But now that he was altogether removed from human sight, the idea might occur that he was raised also to the exercise of an authority, more extensive and lasting than could accompany the possession of sovereignty over the largest empire in this world. He was gone to be associated with

God himself, in directing the unseen influences which act upon the minds and hearts of men. He was to reign in heaven, and the ties which were to unite him with his subjects, as well as the honours and rewards which he was to bestow on them, must all be of a kind that can be recognized and enjoyed by the inmost soul, rather than be made apparent to the bodily sense. Christ has ascended up on high, and thither ought the allegiance of his subjects to follow him with the moral homage of desires, dispositions, and affections, conformed to the holy principles of his doctrines and example.

2. The fact asserted by the Evangelist in our text, is well fitted to suggest encouraging thoughts of the manner in which the moral government of God is carried on. We ought not, perhaps, to require for such thoughts any thing else than the conviction of the perfect goodness and benevolence, which must ever be in closest alliance with the Divine wisdom and power. We ought not to doubt that the Father of mercies will always, in his severest dealings, temper justice with mercy—that He who knoweth our frame will never cease to remember and have pity on our infirmities. But it may sometimes help to strengthen our faith and trust in the Divine benignity and compassion, to think of one in whom benignity and compassion were so constantly conspicuous—to think of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was so mild and gentle, so ready of access to all that needed and asked his aid—as "received up into heaven, and

seated on the right hand of God." It is as though God had thus not only confirmed all his words of gracious promise and invitation, not only fully owned him as his beloved Son in whom He was well pleased, but declared also that He will Himself, in all His dealings, uniformly act in accordance with the dispositions which are so manifest, and at the same time so powerfully attractive and engaging in Christ.

3. But still more directly does the fact of our Lord's ascension seem fitted to raise our thoughts after him, to the serene and peaceful regions in which he now lives and reigns. It is well to have such a fact on which to meditate—such an opening made for a glimpse of a brighter world above us—amidst the cares and conflicts, the troubles and trials of the world in which we live. We are but too apt to have our attention fixed exclusively on the scenes immediately present to us. When they are fair and pleasant, we are in danger of living altogether for them. When they are overshadowed, we are in danger of forgetting that the cloud may be as useful in its season, and as blessed in its consequences, as the sunshine. We are apt to be over-soon elated, and over-soon disheartened. It is well that there should be high places to which our thoughts may rise, and quietly look down for a while upon this every-day world, as well as look upward to a world where, whatever sins and sorrows may be holding temporary dominion below, all is uninterrupted holiness and tranquillity. Such, we may call to mind, as

in imagination we take our stand with the disciples on Mount Olivet, is the heaven to which Jesus has been received up; such is the world where he sitteth on the right hand of God.

4. In close and natural connection with this thought, is the anticipation of the time when we, too, may hope to be with our ascended Lord. We recollect that he hath ascended to his God and our God, to his Father and our Father. We recollect that in the same heavenly mansions to which he is removed, there is room for all who, with the faith and patience learned of him, are resolutely performing the duties, and enduring the trials of our earthly lot. It is but a little while at most, that the hardest trials of faith and patience can last. The hour of release will come, and then how sweet the rest which remaineth for the people of God!

Nay, without any very hard trials of our own faith and patience, with even many claims upon our gratitude for the blessings of our own individual lot, we may yet see around us so much to regret which we know not how to remedy, so much to pity which we know not how to relieve, that the prospect may well be attractive of regions such as we imagine those, in which we shall look upon our Lord in the glory of His exalted state, and find ourselves in company with innumerable partakers in the same blessedness.

5. The fact of our Lord's ascension, by thus carrying our thoughts forward to the time when we shall be with

him where he is, may help us also, in some degree, to look upon things present under the aspect which they will then wear to us. No doubt, they will then be contemplated by us chiefly, if not entirely, in their connection with opportunities for the exercise of qualities essential to the formation of the Christian character. They will be viewed in their bearings on purposes of far more importance than any temporary enjoyment or suffering. They will be regarded as parts of our whole moral discipline and training. And could we now look upon them in the same light, how much would our anxiety and apprehension be often lessened, in seasons that appear to us dark and disastrous! how much also would our danger be lessened of becoming selfish, worldly-minded, and sensual, when the means of ease and comfort are multiplied unto us! Often to rise in imagination with our ascended Lord, and to breathe the pure air of the heaven to which he has been received up, cannot but tend to give us both a quieter and a holier spirit for the scenes through which we have here to pass, and the work which we have now to do.

6. Such a direction for our thoughts, too, may help to keep us in mind, how much nobler than any other are the moral and religious uses which can be made of present times and circumstances—how much more valuable than any other are the spiritual treasures which such uses may accumulate. It is an exhortation of the apostle Paul, and very applicable

as a practical commentary on our text, "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." "Ye are dead"—yes, to the allurements of sin, to the power of temptation, as well as to the assaults of worldly anxiety, we should be dead, if we could keep our thoughts in communion with the ascended Saviour. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God":—yes, that which alone deserves to be called our life, the full and unfettered exercise of pure and holy dispositions, can only be partially manifested here. All that ever attracts our veneration and love in what we can now see of human beings, is but a faint fore-shadowing of the moral beauty and glory which will be unfolded hereafter. Not till the disciples shall enjoy the immediate and constant presence of their Lord, will there be a sunshine around them, bright and powerful enough to bring out from their hearts all the blossoms and fruits of holiness. "When Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory." But, in the meantime, what a value should this thought give to every thing in which we may resemble Him! what an interest it should give to the inquiry, how we can make all present scenes and circumstances subservient to the growth within us of a spirit like His!

7. Lastly, the fact of our Lord's ascension, while

thus raising our thoughts to the heaven into which he has been received up, and awakening our desires after heavenly rather than earthly treasures, is fitted also to give us cheering views of death. To the mind which is often in communion with the ascended Saviour, the termination of this earthly existence can hardly be a prospect of unmingled darkness. To the faithful and affectionate disciple it is rather the time when he, too, shall be received up into heaven—when he, too, shall rise above the cloud that at present keeps his Lord from his sight —when he shall behold the glory which the Father hath bestowed on His beloved son—when he shall bow before the throne of the Divine Majesty, with the sustaining confidence of having a friend and advocate seated on the right hand of God—and when he shall join with "a multitude that no one can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," in giving thanks for their everlasting deliverance from pain and death, from sorrow and sin.

Of this kind appear to me the thoughts likely to rise in our minds, when we seriously and believingly meditate on the great fact asserted by the Evangelist in our text. May those in which we have now been engaged leave some useful impression on us all! May they tend to confirm our faith in the authority and promises, as well as to quicken our desire of living in obedience to the instructions, of that Lord and Saviour, who "was received up into heaven, and

is seated on the right hand of God!" And thus may we carry away with us from our present attendance in the house of prayer, some influences of a nature kindred to those with which the Apostles returned from the Mount on which they had witnessed their Lord's ascension! Amen.

DISCOURSE V.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

Whit-Sunday.

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, LONG-SUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, FAITH (OR FIDELITY), MEEKNESS, TEMPERANCE: AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO LAW. —Galatians v. 22, 23.

WHAT is the spirit of which the Apostle here speaks? By a large portion of the Christian world this day (Whitsunday) is set apart for commemorating a most remarkable communication of power and energy from on high, to the chosen witnesses of the risen Saviour. We read of them that, on the day of Pentecost, "they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." We find also one of them, Peter, declaring that this was a fulfilment of a promise previously made by our Lord, and which, since his exaltation to the right hand of God, he had received from his heavenly Father ability to perform. We farther find the same Apostle thus exhorting his hearers, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you

in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

But did our Lord's promise refer to nothing more than those miraculous endowments, which were to be the peculiar credentials of the commission left by Him with his apostles to teach in his name: or when Peter added to the words just quoted the assurance, "the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," could he be thinking merely of something that was to be the distinction of one particular age, and not rather of something that should last as long as the Gospel itself?

It appears to me that, without doing great violence to many passages in various books of the New Testament, we cannot avoid the belief, that by the Spirit, or Holy Spirit, besides that mode of the Divine agency which was manifested in the miraculous powers communicated to the Apostles, and through them to some others of the early Christians, we must also understand an influence of a much more extensive and enduring, if we may not even say, in reference to its effects, a much more important kind.

The words of our text furnish an instance, in which by the Spirit can hardly have been intended anything more peculiarly belonging to one age of Christianity than to another. They contain a general and unqualified assertion. They must relate to something, with respect to which that assertion is always and entirely true. Now it does not seem to

have been always the fact, that the possession of miraculous powers necessarily led to the exercise of those qualities, which the Apostle has enumerated in describing the fruit of the Spirit. For we find elsewhere directions for the proper use, and warnings against the abuse, of such powers. Nor was it always the fact, that the clearest and most exact knowledge of the truths attested by those powers, led of itself to moral consequences of the kind set forth in the text. For, from the very exhortations to the practice of these and like moral virtues, we may reasonably infer that there was an occasional deficiency in them, even among those who had been thoroughly instructed in both the doctrines and the duties of their religion.

No mere communication of supernatural power, then, or intellectual enlightenment, could be the spirit which the apostle has described as producing so much beautiful and valuable fruit. It would seem, rather, that what he had in mind must have been an influence especially adapted to man's moral nature. His words are applicable to some germ of a moral vitality—some seminal principle of a purely moral growth—some element of goodness which, once introduced into the soul and allowed to work out its proper effect, would naturally go on expanding and ripening into wholesome and pleasant fruit.

It should be observed, that throughout the passage in which we find the text, the spirit is opposed to the flesh, the fruit of the spirit is contrasted with the

works of the flesh. And these latter are so described as to shew that they are, in fact, the consequences arising from an unrestrained indulgence of the natural appetites and propensities. They are the bitter and poisonous fruit of self-gratification allowed to grow wild. The spirit, then, which desireth and striveth against the flesh—the antagonist principle of that which prompts exclusively and inconsiderately to self-indulgence—must be something directly fitted to bring all the natural appetites and propensities under due restraint and regulation.

Now an effort of this kind could hardly fail to be produced by the constant presence of a teacher, friend, and example, like Jesus Christ. I cannot conceive the mind to be in frequent, much less in continued communion with a being so thoroughly pure, holy, benevolent, gentle and amiable, without having its own selfishness and hardness gradually repressed and softened. And had he remained on earth, going about among his disciples, visibly manifesting himself to their various communities, and addressing to them the mild words of encouragement, admonition, or consolation, as respectively needed, we can hardly suppose the moral result to have been otherwise than highly beneficial.

But what if there was actually provision made for a still more extensive result of the same kind? What if there is really a substitute for His visible presence, and a means of even permanently applying to the mind the benefit of such a presence, in

some mode of the Divine influence by which the instructions, doctrines, and whole character of Christ are peculiarly brought home to the heart of the believer—by which the soul is made to feel all the charm and power of his excellence, and to see all things in the clear light of the truths which he revealed?

It seems to me that such an influence, exerted we know not how, but freely communicated to all who earnestly and perseveringly ask it of God in the name of Jesus, is the Spirit which permanently remains to be the substitute for our Lord's visible presence among his disciples, and to be the seminal and vital principle of piety and virtue in their hearts. We find it called sometimes, as in the text, simply the Spirit—a name which is well suited to its secret mode of operation: sometimes the Holy Spirit, with reference, it may be, to that moral excellence which is both its source and its effect. Sometimes the Spirit of Christ, as peculiarly, with all its moral power, manifested in Him, and proceeding directly from Him:—sometimes the Spirit of God, as ultimately, together with every other good and perfect gift, coming from Him and conducting to Him.

The text, however, will lead us more especially to consider the fruit of the Spirit in the signs of its presence—the manifestations of its power. And of great importance it is to observe and bear in mind, what these are declared by the Apostle to be. For else, enthusiasm and fanaticism may be, as they have

repeatedly been, the results of a belief in the doctrine of a Divine influence on the human mind. Men have sometimes expected such an influence to be a complete substitute for intellectual exertion on their own part; or, at least, they have relied on it for infallible guidance, in their application of their intellectual powers to the investigation of moral and religious truth. And thus has not unfrequently been exhibited the strange and perplexing spectacle of contenders for very different, perhaps even contradictory doctrines, alike professing to have been throughout their inquiries assisted, and in their conclusions established, by the Spirit of God. Others, again, have searched for traces and proofs of such a Spirit within them, in mere peculiarities of feeling, in sudden convictions and impressions, for which they have been taught to hope as answers to their prayers for pardon or assistance. And they have been elated or depressed, according as they experienced or missed the imagined evidences of Divine acceptance and favour.

But there is, plainly, no sanction whatever, in the words of our text, to expectations either of extraordinary aid to the understanding, or of sudden changes and excitements in the feelings, as consequences and indications of a divine influence on the soul. The effects there described are altogether of a moral kind. And they are not mere emotions—not momentary awakenings of good sentiments—but abiding dispositions such as may be easily recog-

nised, and in respect to the presence or absence of which, a man, when he really and seriously turns his attention inward, cannot easily impose upon himself.

Nor let it be overlooked that the apostle speaks of these dispositions as the *fruit* of the Spirit. Now that very word suggests that their growth has been a work of time, and warns us, also, not to be satisfied with anything short of their full ripeness. Men are too apt to content themselves with the consciousness of good desires and purposes. But to be so content is to boast in seed-time, as though the harvest were already gathered in. It is to prize the sweetness of the blossom, as though it were of equal value with the fruit. The proper test of the Spirit's presence and power in the heart, is, according to the apostle, not a work about to be begun, or just begun, but a work far advanced and steadily going on to completion. It is not the *seed*, or the *flower*, but the *fruit*.

And then, again, let it be observed, how rich a growth of moral good is included in the true signs of the Divine influence. It is not one single virtuous disposition which will be the result, where the mind has been really brought under the power of that Spirit which is the substitute for Christ's visible presence with his disciples. It is a large cluster of kindred graces and excellences; and not one can be left out without a proportionate diminution in the value of the rest. The Apostle's words are no sanction to those who, because they are conscious of possessing some good qualities, are little concerned

about their deficiencies in others. Yet how often are persons found who appear, at least, to be of this character—who are, perhaps, distinguished by their practice of some virtues, and hardly less distinguished by their neglect of others. How frequently are the religious, the social, and the personal duties treated, as though, instead of being all equally binding and sacred, an exactness in one branch of them furnished, in fact, quite a sufficient apology for less attention to the rest. Thus we may meet with professedly pious men, who seem to have little scruple about the indulgence of uncharitable feelings; and again with benevolent and kind-hearted men, who appear to think themselves exempt from the necessity of cultivating religious affections. So, too, in each of these classes, and even among those who combine the two characters of religious and charitable, there may occasionally be found too little self-watchfulness and self-government. And not seldom where it cannot, perhaps, be said, that the weighter matters of duty, whether religious, social, or personal, are neglected —where the general dispositions and great principles are good,—yet there may be too little care and readiness to bring them into exercise, on occasions that may appear of small importance. Thus there may be piety able to endure a serious affliction, but not applied to soften a momentary vexation. And there may be benevolence ready to confer a substantial benefit, but not keeping watch over the minuter manifestations of kindness in the words and the manner.

The fruit of the Spirit is not thus limited in the number or the activity of its qualities. It is love to both God and man. It is joy, or that cheerfulness which is the fit associate of such love. It is peace —the peace of a heart in friendship with God, and earnestly desirous to be in friendship with man. It is long-suffering, learned of the compassionate and forgiving Saviour. It is gentleness in the temper, words, and whole conduct. It is goodness of disposition, expressing itself on every opportunity, in little matters as well as in great. It is faithfulness, or strict veracity and integrity. It is meekness in self-estimation, and in the whole deportment to others. It is, moreover, temperance, exercising watchful command over every appetite, and careful guard against every sinful kind or degree of enjoyment.

But if all these qualities are combined in the fruit of the Spirit, wherever any one of them is wanting, the unavoidable inference seems to be, that there is only an imperfect subjection of the mind to the power of the Spirit—there is something yet to be earnestly asked of God, and to be sought in communion with Christ. How much more, if only one or two of these qualities are already attained, and those, probably, but partially,—how much more is there, then, need of renewed and persevering application to every means of bringing the mind under those moral influences, which are essential to its spiritual vitality and productiveness.

On the other hand, wherever there is perceived

that fruit of the Spirit which the Apostle has described—wherever are seen in beautiful and harmonious companionship the qualities of mind and heart and life which he has enumerated—there ought to be no doubt, whatever may be the particular form of Christian belief with which they are associated, that it must, at least, include whatever is most vital and valuable in Christianity. It must be the Spirit which has produced the fruit of the Spirit. And where God has given His Spirit, He will not withhold His approbation and favour.

The Apostle, indeed, after enumerating the various graces which he declares to be the fruit of the Spirit, adds the express assurance that "against such there is no law;" clearly implying that there is no displeasure, no condemnatory sentence of the Divine Being to be apprehended, where this fruit of the Spirit is found.

What a rest and refuge for the mind is provided by such an assurance from those not unfrequent representations of later teachers, according to which the doctrines admitted into the belief would seem to be every thing, and the virtues cherished and practised in the heart and life must all be counted as nothing, with regard to the probability of the Divine acceptance. There is not one peculiarity of belief mentioned by the Apostle when describing the fruit of the Spirit. He enumerates only qualities which are quite compatible, and which have been repeatedly found associated with many and great varieties of conscientious belief. It would appear, then, that such varieties are not

always necessary hindrances, if they may not even be all made instrumental, to the powerful and effectual working of the same Divine and Holy Spirit.

The Apostle, I would farther remark, has made no mention of loud and boasting professions in describing the fruit of the Spirit. On the contrary, in the qualities which he has mentioned, there seems an intimation of the quiet and unostentatious manner in which the Spirit carries on its work. To my mind, at least, his words suggest the idea of a growth from the seed to the fruit, nurtured in greater privacy, and by gentler influences than are wont to satisfy many a loud-talking religionist. They suggest the idea of a constant desire and endeavour to be religious, without any reference to the distinction of being so accounted. Nor does it seem unlikely that the work of the Spirit in the heart, should resemble, in respect to its quiet and gradual operation, the genial and fertilizing influences, the gentle dews and rain and sunshine, which are constantly preparing beauty and abundance for the natural world. And just as in many a retired and seldom-noticed spot of the natural world these influences are, with least disturbance, proceeding to the most valuable ultimate effects, so in many a humble and modest mind that studies only how to approve itself unto God, and seeks not, as it needs not, the incentive of human approbation, the work of God's benevolent and holy Spirit may be quietly going on, maturing the good seed of the word into a rich harvest of graces and virtues.

May that same Spirit work effectually in each one of us, applying to our hearts the whole moral power and persuasion of our Lord's instructions and example, and not allowing us to rest satisfied with any single attainment, but leading us on to a constant growth of holy desires, purposes, and affections, to all the qualities which combine to form its perfect and beautiful fruit.

AMEN.

DISCOURSE VI.

THOUGHTS ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WHEN YE COME TOGETHER THEREFORE INTO ONE PLACE, THIS IS NOT TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER.—I. Cor. xi. 20.

We are apt to think that the first age of Christianity must have been one in which the influences of its pure and holy spirit would be strongest on the practice of its professors. We are apt to make the first Christian Churches our ideal models of what such communities ought to be.

But from the earliest writings in the New Testament (those of the Apostle Paul), it is plain, that Christian influences, even in the hearts of believers, had often a hard and not always successful struggle with others which they had brought with them from their unconverted state. Jews and Heathens, however won over to a belief in the Divine commission and authority of Jesus, appear often to have remained, in many respects, Jews and Heathens still. Nor, perhaps, to this day, has the whole leaven of Juda-

ism and Heathenism been put away from either the doctrines or the practices of Christians.

In the church at Corinth, besides most unseemly divisions, and some very flagrant immoralities, a monstrous abuse appears to have arisen in connection with the mode of celebrating the Lord's supper; as the commemoration of our Lord's death on the cross was thus early called. It was made the occasion, or the accompaniment of a feast, at which, as every one brought his own provisions, some indulged themselves in a shameful and hurtful excess, while some of their poorer brethren had not enough to satisfy their hunger. One consequence was, that many suffered in their bodily health the natural penalties of gluttony and intemperance. Another consequence was, that the great object of the original institution was put altogether out of sight. When they came together at these times, as the Apostle tells them, it was "not to eat the Lord's supper;" which, he afterwards goes on to remind them, was intended to be a simple commemoration of our Lord's death, by the symbolic actions of eating bread and drinking wine as memorials of his body and his blood.

To us, who read the narratives left us by three of the Evangelists of the manner in which Jesus, at his last meal with his disciples, requested them thus to keep him in remembrance, it may well seem strange that, within thirty years afterwards, a Christian church should have so far and so disgracefully

departed from the simplicity and the intention of the original rite. But the Apostle's words leave us in no doubt of the fact, that the abuse did for a while exist; though, most probably, his own strong remonstrance had the effect of both putting an end to it in the church at Corinth, and preventing its recurrence any where else.

Neither his words, however, nor those of the Evangelists, in their records of what took place when our Lord first gave to the bread and wine of the Passover supper their new significancy, as memorials of himself and his death, prevented other mistakes and corruptions from in time gathering, like so many clouds, around this simple ceremony. By degrees its original and intelligible design was more and more hidden from view, by mystical representations of the peculiar holiness, and the peculiar efficacy, connected with this one religious observance. The bread and wine came to be considered no longer as emblems and symbols, but as the subjects of a mysterious and miraculous change, whereby they were actually converted into the very body and blood of Christ; and to partake of them in faith, after they had undergone this change, was thought to be an especial means of uniting the believer with him, and securing, through this union, a thorough purification from all sin.

Yet, not very consistently with such notions, any more than with the language of the New Testament writers, who certainly no where restrict the cup to

one class of communicants, the clergy came, in process of time, to be considered as alone worthy to partake of the consecrated and mysteriously metamorphosed wine, while the laity had to content themselves with the similarly changed bread, or wafer which was made the substitute for bread.

To both clergy and laity, also, both the bread and the wine, after the change which they were supposed to have undergone, became the objects, not only of reverence, but of actual adoration; and instead of being regarded as memorials only of the death once suffered on the cross, were rather considered as positive renewals of it, and so themselves constituting a sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

In later times, churches which rejected these extreme views, as both unscriptural and irrational, and scrupled not to call some practices to which they led not merely superstitious but idolatrous, yet still contended for a peculiar holiness and efficacy as accompanying a faithful participation of the Lord's supper, beyond its natural suggestions of serious and profitable thought as a commemoration of His death. Though they would not admit that the bread and wine were actually changed into His body and blood, yet they maintained, or at least used language implying, that His body and blood were, in some manner, mysteriously present with the bread and wine, and that reverently and faithfully to partake of these visible and tangible substances was, in some way, however inexplicable, to receive a

spiritual nourishment, not otherwise to be obtained, from His invisible presence.

Very widely has been diffused by such representations, even where they have not been admitted to their full extent, a vague feeling of mysteriousness and awfulness, and at the same time, efficacy, as connected with the Lord's Supper, which does not exist in relation to any other religious service. And this feeling has, very probably, had the double effect of deterring many persons from partaking of it at its times of regular occurrence, and making as many very anxious to partake of it when apprehensive of soon dying. They have shrunk from an habitual, or even frequent attendance at the Lord's table, as something for which they were not good enough. But they have been eager, by one act at least of communion with him before death, to secure whatever might be its benefit, as a passport in the unknown country on which they were about to enter.

Other churches, again, while keeping more closely to the original design and scriptural representation of the Lord's Supper as simply a commemorative service, have yet made a participation in it a condition and sign of church-membership; and moreover, have taken upon themselves to declare who shall, and who shall not, be permitted to join in it. Forgetting, apparently, that there was no word of exclusion in our Lord's first utterance of the invitation, "this do in remembrance of me," even though Peter, whose denial of him he foresaw, and Judas, whose

agreement already made to betray him he knew, were among his companions at table,—forgetting also still more strangely the express words of the Apostle Paul, "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup";—forgetting, I say, apparently all this, these churches have made it a rule that a person shall first be examined by others, and be pronounced by them sound in faith, as well as morally worthy, before being allowed to sit down with them at the Lord's table. Thus have they made it, in fact, their own table and not his, and constituted themselves, in his stead, the masters of the feast and the inviters of the company.

Among other churches, on the contrary, and our own is of the number, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is entirely an open service, all the members of a congregation, nay, all who are present when notice is given that it is about to be celebrated, whether members or strangers, are at liberty to join, are invited to join, if they feel themselves so disposed, in this symbolical commemoration of Christ and Him crucified. No one considers himself authorised to examine beforehand into their fitness, or unfitness, to take part in it. No one requires of them, previously, or at the time, a particular profession of their faith; nor is any peculiar creed so interwoven with the language employed in the service, that attendance at the service must necessarily imply assent to the creed. Jesus is left to be considered as the provider of the feast, and the inviter to

it, and no one ventures to interpose between him and those who are willing to accept his invitation.

Yet this complete openness of the service, as usual among the churches of our denomination, does not appear to have had the effect of increasing the desire to attend upon it. Rather it would appear to have had the effect of actually lessening the practice of attending. Not only here, but, so far as I know, elsewhere, the disposition thus to commemorate the death of Christ, bears only a small proportion to the opportunities afforded for joining in the commemoration. The actual attendants upon it at any one time, and still more the habitual attendants, are very few compared with those who either neglect it altogether, or content themselves with a very rare participation in it.

I wish to say a few words on this state of things among us. They will not be words of reproof, for which, speaking only as a brother among brethren, I do not feel that I have any authority. Neither will they be words of urgent exhortation; for thus I should hesitate to speak on behalf of any purely ceremonial observance,—however loving it myself,—lest I should seem to put it on a level with matters appertaining to the religion of the heart and life. But they will be words freely expressive of my own views and feelings in relation to the Lord's Supper; such as my place among you, even only as a fellow-believer and fellow-worshipper, will abundantly warrant me in uttering.

To my own mind then, fellow-Christians, a frequent attendance on this commemorative service recommends itself, as carrying my thoughts back to the closing and affecting scenes and events of our Lord's earthly history—to the solemn and affectionate words in which he prepared his disciples for his departure from amidst them,—to his last social meeting and meal with them, at which he instituted the simple rite which was to be thenceforward a means of putting them in remembrance of him,—to his agony and prayers at Gethsemane,—to his cross and the spirit of trust, and love, and compassion, which there breathed forth from his dying lips,—to the quiet of his garden-sepulchre, where he rested safe from all that man could do unto him, and to the words of comfort and of hope, in which, after rising from that sepulchre, he directed the hearts of his disciples, then and for ever, to his Father and our Father, his God and our God.

Attendance on this commemorative service also recommends itself to my own mind, as giving me a feeling of being in communion with all who, with sincerity of purpose and simplicity of reverential love, have thus renewed their remembrance of the same Lord, and their thankfulness to the same God; with those who, in times of danger and persecution on account of the name which was precious to their souls, met together in secret, wherever caverns, or rocks, or deserts, might hide them from unfriendly notice, to encourage and strengthen one another by

a joint commemoration of their beloved Master,—with those too who, exiles and fugitives, scattered over various and distant lands, carried with them the practice of thus calling him to their remembrance, and bequeathed it as an inheritance to the churches which they planted, and desired to keep in union with their one great Head; with all, in short, who, any where and at any time, have thus given themselves, or are still giving themselves, an additional and frequent opportunity of recollecting and meditating on that new commandment, which should speak so forcibly to every successive age from the cross of Christ, "that we should love one another as he hath loved us."

Nor is it, by any means, a small recommendation to me of attendance on this service, that I thereby am often made to feel as though still retaining a living bond with those who have sate with me at the Lord's table, but whose places, both there and elsewhere on earth, have ceased to have them for occupants. In the forty-two years which have this day been completed since I partook of my first communion in this house of prayer, many have been those who have here joined with me in shewing forth the Lord's death, and whom I shall see no more till I meet them in his living presence. In communion with him, I feel as belonging to a church of which they are still members. In renewing my remembrance of him, I awaken also recollections of those who have lived in the joyful light of the faith, and

died in the strong comfort of the hope which they had learned, as I too would learn of him.

For reasons of this kind, I have long loved the service which has for its especial object, a reverent and affectionate commemoration of the Lord Jesus. I like to have frequently presented to my sight and touch, the memorials of his body and his blood. I feel as though it is thus easier to imagine myself at the foot of his cross, and to ask myself what that cross should teach me. I think, too, that I have often been the stronger in faith, the wiser in purpose, the better in my whole frame of mind, for the meditations into which I have been led by attendance on this service. I am, therefore, myself disposed always to welcome its returning occasions, and would not willingly miss any of them.

But I have no right to make my own feelings the measures of my requirements from others. I have no right to speak as though they who attend such a service, however regularly, must necessarily, on that account merely, be better Christians than those who neglect it. I do not even feel authorised to urge such an attendance upon any of my fellow-worshippers, as a positive duty which they owe to their Lord. I should, indeed, be very glad, if there were more of them to whom the service appeared in the same attractive light as to myself. I could not but be encouraged and warmed by their sympathy with me in this respect. But I leave the question whether they ought to attend on such a service, to be decided by

themselves. "Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind;" and I am quite willing to allow, that there may be as much sincere and fervent religion in connection with a different persuasion from mine on this subject, as in connection with that which I feel myself. Yes, my fellow-Christians; and when I see so many of you, as I often do, after notice given that the Lord's Supper is about to be celebrated, going away as though they had no interest in such a commemoration, and so few remaining to join in it, I would fain keep myself in mind, and try hard to do so, that they who go away, or at least several of them, may carry with them, and have abiding in them, quite as much reverence and love for Jesus, quite as earnest and strong a desire to live in that practical remembrance of him which is shown by obedience to his commands and endeavours after a likeness to his spirit, as any of those who remain to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, which are to them memorials of his death. Nevertheless, as one of those who, on the present occasion, are about to remain, I may be allowed to express my entire sympathy with the feelings expressed by Mr. Thom, in his concluding remarks on the same portion of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, from which I have taken my text. These are his words—

"One point this whole passage does determine,—namely, that this memorial service was not confined to those who witnessed it, and that it had a fitness and application out of Judea, and beyond the circle

of the first disciples. It is the only symbolic service, in its character of a Church, which Christianity possesses; and one sometimes wonders, that those who are ready to complain of the bareness of our worship, coldly hold themselves apart from the breathing spirit of this memorial act. And how full of significance, of deep life, are these spiritual symbols! To shew forth the Lord's death until he come! Can we pass a day, righteously, mercifully, meekly, resignedly, without the spirit of the Lord's death? Are we sure that it might not be good to watch with him one hour, as in a spiritual Gethsemane, before, in the world, we incur the risk of deserting him at the Cross? Might it not be well to bear about with us the Dying of the Lord Jesus, that the Life also of the Lord Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." *

My brethren, I commend these words of another, as well as those which I have myself addressed to you, to your serious and friendly consideration, and whether they influence any of you or not, with respect to attendance on the Lord's supper, may they have the effect of deepening in all our minds, an interest in the history and the character which that service commemorates.

AMEN.

* See "St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians: An Attempt to convey their Spirit and Significance.—By John Hamilton Thom." pp. 157-8.

DISCOURSE VII.

SABBATH WALKS.

AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT HE WENT THROUGH THE CORN-FIELDS ON THE SABBATH-DAY.—Mark ii. 23 (part)

IT is not long since the great yearly holiday of this neighbourhood * enabled many thousands to enjoy the pleasure of being abroad amidst the pure air and refreshing scenery of the fields and gardens. And, probably, it was a time spent most innocently, and is now recollected with great satisfaction by those whose greatest enjoyment in it was to look upon the wondrous and beautiful works of God.

But this is an enjoyment which needs not be of so rare occurrence as our recent holiday. In the long days of summer, either before the commencement or after the conclusion of the daily business, there may be found by many some little leisure for a quiet and refreshing walk; and each returning day of rest brings opportunities to all who are in health, of securing to themselves some enjoyment of this kind.

Nor must that day be necessarily desecrated, a

* Whitsuntide.

portion of which is given to such enjoyment. Our Lord would not have been walking through the corn fields on the Sabbath-day with his disciples, if there had been anything wrong—anything unpleasing to God—in so doing.

At the same time, it certainly does not appear that he was in the fields at the hour when prayer was offered in the synagogue. The contrary may be inferred from the presence also of the Pharisees. Besides, we find it mentioned, immediately after, that "he entered again into the synagogue." This, indeed, might be, and according to St. Luke, was, on another Sabbath. But from the way in which it is mentioned—"he entered again"—as well as from various passages in our Lord's history, we may infer that his attendance on public worship was a regular custom.

His sabbath walks, then, were probably taken in hours that preceded or followed those of such attendance. They were walks, too, still more probably, very different in their character, very different in the train of thoughts that accompanied them, from those of many who go through the fields on the Sabbath-day. They were not walks of idle wandering. They were not walks of mere relaxation; though, no doubt, often answering the purpose of the sweetest refreshment to both body and mind. They must have been truly Sabbath walks.

The example of our Lord, then, though sanctioning a Sabbath walk in the fields, yet only sanctions it as

an addition to, not as a substitute for, the refreshment to be found in the house of prayer; and, moreover, as a means of continuing, not of effacing the good impressions which have there been made.

And this sanction is strengthened, if it needs to be strengthened, by the same principle to which our Lord appealed in his conversation with the Pharisees —that "the Sabbath was made for man." It was intended for his benefit and comfort in every way. It was made to be a day in which pleasure and improvement, each in the greatest degree compatible with the other, should be combined. It was given to be a day rescued, as much as possible, from the turmoil and trouble of worldly business and worldly thoughts, and spent amidst all that can remind us of a more peaceful and heavenly home.

According to this view of the Sabbath, one very natural and proper employment of it is to commune with God in His works—to go where we may trace His hand in every thing that we behold, where we may, in a manner, feel His presence above and around us. And this, I think, we can hardly help doing, when we are abroad in the fields on a fine day; especially if our minds have their Sabbath dress on—if they are disposed to calm and serious reflection.

There may easily be imagined a great use of such an exercise of the thoughts, whether it occurs before the commencement, in the intervals, or after the conclusion of our public devotions. It may be use-

ful as a preparation—by tranquillising and refreshing our minds amidst scenes of the Creator's bounty and Providence, by making us eye witnesses of His glory in the heavens and His wonders in the earth, and thus giving us, as it were, hearts in tune for His praise. It may be useful as a supplement to our meditations and services in the house of prayer. Perhaps, from the unavoidable deficiencies of such services, the words there spoken may not have been so much in season to us as we could have wished. Or, perhaps, a hint applicable to our particular circumstances, and which we should have liked to follow out, may only have been incidentally, and amidst a variety of other topics, suggested. In such cases, we may find a voice in the fields that will continue and complete the discourse or the prayer left imperfect. We may meet our Lord there, and take counsel with Him. We may read something of what we wanted, written by God's own hand on His works. A Sabbath walk may also be useful as part of the conclusion to the whole business of the day. The quiet of evening, spent amidst the beautiful scenery and productions of nature, may dispose us to both pleasant and profitable recollections and reconsideration of every good thought suggested during the day. It may prepare us to kneel down afterwards in our families, in the cheerful spirit of true devotion, and to go to our rest with heart-felt thankfulness for the appointment of days so full of comfort and refreshment to the soul.

It appears to me, that Sabbath walks of this kind have in them something peculiarly congenial with the proper business of the day; and that, moreover, without devoting a part of the day to such recreations, we can hardly be said to make the most of God's kind provision, either for our benefit or our enjoyment. At the same time, in reference to those who would make it altogether, or nearly so, a day for taking what they call their pleasure—who think even two or three hours of it too much to spend in the house of prayer—I am prepared to maintain that, even with respect to their professed object, the enjoyment of the day, they commit an egregious mistake. And this, I think, they would themselves acknowledge, if they could but once compare their own feelings, after one of their pleasantest days, (in which, however, religious exercises and religious thoughts have contributed no share of the pleasantness) with the feelings of those who have spent the same time in drawing nigh unto God, both by their devout attendance in the house of prayer, and by their instructive and cheerful communings with Him in His wonderful and glorious works. For at the end of a day devoted to what is called pleasure, and, in no part of it, consecrated by religion, what is there to recollect? What is there to be set down as a gain?—as an advantage which still remains?—At most, perhaps, some little refreshment of the animal health and spirits by the bodily exercise which has been taken, or by the change of air and scene. But

often, to set against this, there has been excess in eating and drinking, intemperate and unseemly mirth, idle and foolish talking, unwarranted and wasteful expense.—Is there anything to be envied in such recollections?—and, more especially, has *he* any cause to envy them, who has also had his pleasures, and has now pleasure in recollecting them?—He, too, has been refreshed in body as well as mind, by his enjoyment of the Sabbath. He, too, has had a pleasant cessation from his weekly labours. He, too, has benefited by a change of air and scene. He, too, has breathed the pure breeze of the fields. He, too, has been abroad amidst their varied and cheerful scenery. But the face of nature did not look the less smiling, because he had also found time to worship nature's God. The breeze was not the less refreshing, because it bore to his ear the whispers of a Divine presence. The songs of the birds were not less musical, because he had himself been joining in the songs of the temple. The grass was not less green, nor the flowers less beautiful, because he read in them the same character of their Maker which he had heard proclaimed in His word. The Sabbath has indeed been a day of pleasure to him:—and that pleasure has, at the same time, been health and strength to his soul. Without being, in any sense, the poorer, he is, in a most important sense, the richer for his enjoyment of it.

To those, then, who would use the Sabbath as a day given them for their pleasure, I would say, by

all means do so—use it as a day given you by a Being who delights to see His creatures happy:—but, by all means, be sure also that you take the right way to make it a day of pleasure—be sure that you are not foolishly and unthankfully perverting your Creator's merciful appointment to your own injury. It must be wise in us to make the most of His appointment. Do so, by deriving from it all the good that you can. Is the knowledge of God a good?—Make yourselves acquainted with Him in His works and in His word. Is confidence in God a good?—Acquire it by the habit of cheerful and devout worship. Is delight in the presence of God a good?—Learn to associate the idea of His presence with every thing that He has made. Is the hope of immortality a good?—Learn to give yourselves security in the promise of it, by beholding, every where around you, proofs of His power and unchangeableness who gave the promise.

In such exhortations, if I mistake not, will be found motives both to devout and regular worship of God in the house of prayer, and to frequent communing with Him in our Sabbath-walks. And if we act under the influence of those motives, religion will assume in its dealings with our hearts, and in its aspect to those who observe us, that cheerful and inviting character which properly belongs to it. The Sabbaths of a Christian have nothing to do with sadness and severity. They are his festivals; and his joyful countenance should shew that he so

accounts them. "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn," said our Lord, "so long as the bridegroom is with them?" The Sabbath, my friends, appears to me a day when our Lord, as the Master of the feast, invites us to be with him; and whether he takes us to the house of prayer, or, in the hours for which there is no employment there, bids us walk out with him into the fields, we should cheerfully accompany him.

It was certainly a great privilege of the first disciples, that in their Sabbath walks they had such a friend and instructor with them. But we are not without some substitute for this visible presence of our Lord, in our Christian knowledge. If we have not him with us to make audible discourse upon the various hints of instruction and consolation suggested by the works of God, we may have recollections of the manner in which he has actually discoursed upon them. When, for instance, we are walking through fields that have been newly sown, and, perhaps, see traces of the sowers having been there, in seeds still lying scattered by the way-side—or see birds employed in picking them up, and carrying them away,—does not our Lord's parable come almost as forcibly into our minds, as if he were himself repeating it to us? Do we not recognise the warning to examine whether the good seed have a more safe and abiding place in our hearts?—Or when, at other times, we see fields already green with the springing corn, do we not at once recollect the

words, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear?" And does not our Lord thus, in fact, become our monitor of the growth which ought also to be going on in our religious principles, as well as our encourager to wait with patience when we have done our best to implant such principles in others, and not expect the harvest all at once.—Or when we observe the tree putting forth leaves from its tender branches, and know by this sign that summer is nigh, have we not in this also a remembrancer of our Lord, and of his predictions, some long ago fulfilled, and others no less certainly to be fulfilled? —Or when we are merely looking upon the grass of the field, so green and flourishing, and the wild flowers mingled with it, often so delicate and beautiful, is it possible to forget what lessons he drew from them? Do they not still, with the voice which he gave them, upbraid us with our little faith, if we cannot trust the fatherly care which clothes and nourishes them?—Or, when we stand admiring some extensive prospect of earth and sky, and, perhaps, are thinking how lasting are the scenes of inanimate nature compared with the beings who successively look upon them, do we never go on to the thought of something more durable still? Do we never call to mind the assurance of our Lord, "the heavens and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"? Do we never tell ourselves, that in this assurance is contained a field for our contemplations and imaginings, far more vast, more sublime and inspiring, than any which the material world can unfold to us?

Truly, my friends, it appears to me that recollections of our Lord's instructions, of his warnings, promises and consolations, must be closely interwoven with the Christian's meditations on the works of God. I cannot imagine him in his Sabbath walks, unaccompanied in such recollections by Jesus Christ. I cannot imagine him beholding what order and beauty are the results of obedience to the Divine law in the natural world, and not earnestly desiring, also, that in the moral world, and especially in that world which is more immediately under his own inspection—the world of his own heart—the will of God may be done. I can imagine him saying "how beautiful is the appearance of spring in the garden and in the fields! but oh, how far more beautiful is the spring of faith, of hope, of charity, of virtue, of piety in the human soul!—How richly does the earth repay the labours of the husbandman! but oh, how transcendantly more rich and glorious would be the moral harvest, if men would universally bestow the needful culture on their hearts!—Oh, let me learn wisdom and encouragement from the manifested and powerful energy of God in the world of nature;—let me feel confident that He who sendeth His rain and sunshine to bless and make fruitful the cultivated earth, will as certainly send down the light of His blessing, and the dews of His grace, on the honest and humble heart, in which the good seed of His word is treasured!

Nor will the world of nature present to the Christian emblems merely of the culture and growth

which ought to take place in the moral world; but it will supply him also with emblems of what ought to be his greatest fears and hopes. The tares which he may see among the corn, will remind him of the evils and imperfections that may easily mingle with his good qualities,—will remind him of the care and diligence requisite to prevent an overgrowth of weeds, fit only for burning, in his final harvest. And when he reflects from what the blade which he sees covering the earth with fresh verdure, arises—when he remembers that there must first have been decay and corruption of the grain which was put into the ground—when he considers the power and glory of this vegetable resurrection,—how can his mind stop short of the hope confirmed by Him who died and rose again, that man also, from like weakness and dishonour and corruption, shall be raised to strength and glory and immortality? Here, indeed, it is an apostle of whom the emblem will immediately remind him; but the doctrine taught by that apostle must remind him of that Saviour on whom the apostle rested the confidence of his hope.

I have thus, my friends, laid before you the thoughts suggested to me by the text. And I trust that your time has not been unprofitably spent in listening to them, if I have persuaded any of you to let your walks on the Sabbath, in those hours when the house of prayer is closed, be Sabbath walks—to let them serve the double purpose of recreation to both the body and the soul—to let them be sanctified

with the spirit, and carry on the work of your services in the house of prayer—to let them, in short, be walks with Jesus and with God. You will admit that you cannot have more improving, and I do not think that you can have pleasanter companions. But one advantage of such society is, that it may be shared with other friends. And no friends are likely to be more valuable, or more lastingly pleasant, than those with whom you can easily and naturally share such society—walking with them as fellow-disciples of the same Lord, and children of the same God, and taking sweet counsel together on the truths which you have learned from these Teachers.

May God grant that the thoughts which have been suggested, may be profitably followed out in your own farther meditations and communings. AMEN.

DISCOURSE VIII.

HOPES AND WISHES SUITED TO A SABBATH WELCOME OF THE NEW YEAR.

WHAT MAN IS HE THAT DESIRETH LIFE, AND LOVETH MANY DAYS, THAT HE MAY SEE GOOD?—Psalm xxxiv., 12.

THE love of life, and the desire of its continuance, are feelings that may naturally be expected to last as long as there is any prospect of its being enjoyed. Often, indeed, have they survived all likelihood of benefit from the protraction of existence. Much more may they maintain their strength, when there is any reasonable hope to feed them, and, reasonable or not, there is generally some lurking expectation of good to come, in all our wishes to see many days.

It is partly this expectation that supplies the cheerfulness of the welcome which they, who think they have a good deal of life in store, are generally disposed to give to the beginning of a new year. If they have parted from the last in friendship, they hope to find as kind a friend in its successor; or, if they have felt glad to have done with it, as a period

in which they have known more trouble than enjoyment, they enter upon the next as a new experiment which, they hope, will be more successful. The days to come, they think, may bring the good which those that are gone have denied them.

I should, doubtless, preach to you a very interesting sermon, if I could tell you beforehand how this new year will turn out to every one of you;—if, looking around on my different hearers, and reading the secret thoughts of their several hearts, I could say to one, what you are wishing shall be accomplished—to another, what you are fearing shall not come upon you—to a third, what you are anxious and troubled about shall turn out to your advantage —to a fourth, all that now contributes to your happiness shall remain in full security.

But, though I cannot thus be a prophet of the good which I may desire for you, I may still preach a discourse in unison with those wishes of happiness which, at this season, we exchange with one another. And, perhaps, I may suggest some things which, rightly followed out and applied, may help not a little in the accomplishment of such wishes. For there are not a few respects in which it will depend upon ourselves, whether this new year shall be a happy one to us or not. And, in relation to all that does depend upon ourselves, it is surely desirable to know what we may most reasonably hope, as well as what we shall do best to wish.

In our more festive welcome to the year on which

we have entered, we have not, perhaps, thought very much on what we mean by the good wishes which we have interchanged with our friends. But, in the house of prayer, it is only natural that our welcome should be accompanied with a more serious, though not essentially less cheerful spirit, and with hopes and desires of a kind that we may properly bring with us to the altar of God.

Now, to be of such a kind, they must, evidently, include nothing which would make us feel any inconsistency in asking upon them His blessing. They must be, at least, innocent; and it will be still better, if they extend to something beyond the mere enjoyment of life. For though it is natural to wish for health, for success in our affairs, for the preservation and prosperity of our friends, yet there may be a great difference in the character of such wishes, according to the more or less important plans and purposes which we connect with their fulfilment. It is one thing to hope for health and long life, merely that our individual comforts may not be interrupted; and another to desire them, that we may go on in pursuits with which the gratification and improvement of others, as well as our own, is connected. It is one thing to wish well to our friends, because they are necessary to our own happiness; and another, to be filled with a benevolent concern for their welfare, and on account of the good which they may receive as well as do, to desire that they may see many days.

All virtuous and benevolent wishes may, with peculiar propriety, be offered to the blessing of God. They may be cherished as a part of the reasonable and religious cheerfulness with which it is allowable to look forward, at the beginning of another year.

But it is a good thing for our best wishes not to be too vague in their nature, and indefinite in their objects. At least, what we desire for ourselves should be, as much as possible, defined and limited to our actual circumstances, and the peculiar line of our duties. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?"—Let him, in the first place, consider the particular good which lies nearest to his situation. Does he begin the new year with a hope that it will be to him a happy year? Let him see what he can himself do to make it so. The sources of human comfort and enjoyment are variously distributed. They are not all crowded together in one enchanted region, so as to make it necessary that they who would be happy should leave their respective scenes of daily occupation, and set out on a distant pilgrimage. Such pilgrims have never found the land of promise.

In the infancy of geographical knowledge, it was long and fondly imagined that there was a part of the earth, where a perpetual salubrity and mildness and serenity of climate, together with an inexhaustible productiveness of the soil, without the necessity of labour, secured to the inhabitants a life of constant and perfect enjoyment—without cares, without

diseases, without want, without vices, without evil passions. But no progress of discovery ever reached those fortunate islands, as they were called. It was always necessary to suppose their situation more and more remote; till every supposition was proved fallacious, and the advance of knowledge dispelled the whole dream of their existence.

It is only a like infancy of moral knowledge that dreams of any particular circumstances and duties, connected with the outward condition of man, as necessarily, and without effort or thought on the part of the individual, producing happiness. As the geographer has been obliged successively to strike out from his map of the world the regions which he had assigned for the residence of the happy, and to put in their place countries subject to the same natural laws, and inhabited by the same kind of beings, which were found in the rest of the earth, so has the collector and comparer of moral experience been unable to point out any combination of outward advantages, from which happiness must necessarily be the result. He has been obliged to leave it an undetermined question, where a man may, or where he may not, discover the secret of enjoyment. Or rather, he has left us to conclude that the real secret consists in knowing how to make the best of every situation in which we can be placed, and every event as it occurs. Instead of allowing us to suppose that the fountain of happiness is to be found only in some favoured and almost inaccessible retirement, his ob-

servations rather encourage us to believe, that the element which it pours forth to those who are permitted to drink most largely of it, is nowhere very different from that of which almost every man may discover a spring on his own ground, if he will but dig for it.

Let, then, a season which naturally awakens our hopes and wishes for the time to come, awaken also our attentive consideration of the means and opportunities which we actually possess, for making that time productive of advantage and enjoyment. Let us ask ourselves what we mean by the wish of happiness. Let us see how much of our meaning is reasonable and practicable. Let us see what share prudence and industry may have in its accomplishment. Let us take care that the building of our hope has a solid foundation in the realities of our actual condition. Let us measure our field, before we calculate our harvest, and know what the soil is naturally fitted to produce, before we cast in the seed. And having regulated our expectations by reasonable probabilities, rather than by mere imaginings, let us not be dreaming of the harvest, when we should be making the most of our spring-time, but apply ourselves with promptness and diligence to the business of the actual season.

Besides being regulated by the nature and opportunities of our respective stations, our hopes and wishes, in order to be reasonably offered to the blessing of God, should be adjusted to the due exercise

of those moral qualities upon which, as the experience of others is continually showing us, much of the good that we desire in life depends. The enjoyment arising from a proper control over the temper and passions, and a generous remembrance of what is due to those among whom we live, is, in fact, a good that lies still more within every man's reach than any advantages of an external nature. If by means of prudence, fidelity, civility, and diligence, he may not unreasonably expect to have some influence upon his success in the world, still more reasonable will be the hope of comfort in himself and in his home, which he founds on the exercise of temperance, meekness, considerate judgments and kind affections. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." Our duties to God, and our relations to one another, are all to be brought into connection with our hopes from the time which is before us. They all, indeed, properly belong to the means and opportunities which we possess, in our respective circumstances, for giving ourselves in some degree, a command over the future.

Here, then, as a part of our religious services, and before we conclude this first Sabbath of the year, let our hopes for a happy part in the events which it may be bringing on, become prayers that we may be kept in the steady performance of a pious part

towards God, and an affectionate part towards those with whom we are connected. Here let our wishes and hopes become such as are proper for beings dependent on an Almighty Benefactor, and dependent also on one another. Here let them be abundant in suggestions of the benefit which we may mutually confer and receive, as members of society, as neighbours, friends, and relatives. Here let the hope of happiness in the time to come, draw closer every bond of brotherhood. Here let it whisper renewed vows of mutual kindness and consideration. Here let it revive every generous and tender feeling, to which we have any of us trusted for comfort and support in one another.

It may seem hardly consistent with the spirit of cheerfulness in which we are, many of us, probably, disposed at this season to look forward, if I remind you, that not all our prudence in the management of our respective advantages, nor all our care to preserve a due control over our tempers and passions, nor all our success in cherishing the kind affections which are the strength and charm of our relations to our fellow-beings, can give us an absolute security, that the year will bring with it no disappointment of our hopes.

Yet it will be wise to let our confidence, even in our most reasonable prospects, be moderated by such a remembrance. Let us not forget, that we are not absolute masters of the future. But let us not forget, also, that if we are not, it is because the

ordering of our affairs is in better hands than our own. This recollection, properly applied, is enough to revive in our hopes that cheerfulness which the other thought of their uncertainty might have a tendency to deaden. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?" Let him follow his wisest judgment, in devising how he may derive every possible advantage and rational enjoyment from the opportunities of his situation; let him consider how, in proportion to his means, he may make his life most valuable to himself and all who are connected with him:—but let him also impress on his mind this conviction, that, if events do not turn out according to his expectations, it can only be, because God designed for him some different good from that which he had himself contemplated. "The hopes of the righteous" cannot fail in the end to be "gladness." The uncertainties to which *his* plans and wishes, like those of other men, are liable, affect only the particular means which may appear to him connected with his outward condition;—they reach not to the great end which he contemplates. If he does not always see the particular good which had, perhaps, shared in making him desire life and hope for many days, he remembers that "it is also good for a man to hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Bound up closely with his filial and trusting love of God is likely to be the conviction, that all things, even though disappointments, and denials of expected joys, be among them,

"shall work together for good to them that love God."

Here, then, is a thought fitted to be received both among the cheerful anticipations with which some of us, and among the sadder reflections with which others, are entering upon this new year. It is a thought which gently moderates the eagerness of earthly hope, without forbidding its natural indulgence. While they who, from their advance in life, or the nature of their past experience, have but faint expectation of good in the years which remain, are prompted by the same thought to put on a more cheerful courage, and to trust in the Being who knows what trials are required by His creatures, and who also can strengthen their hearts for the endurance of all that He appoints.

You, therefore, who have encouragement in your present circumstances to desire life, and to love many days, that you may see good—you who have youth, health, cheerful prospects, and happy affections, to prompt your hopes and wishes—you, too, whose more mature experience has already found a quiet and rational enjoyment in the round of regular duties, and in kind intercourse with your friends and families—fear not to mingle with your prayers to God the natural expression of your desire for the continuance of all reasonable, virtuous, and benevolent pleasures. May He who has been your helper and benefactor hitherto, fulfil your hope in the years which are to come! May He continue in the enjoy-

ment of each other's society those who have hitherto been a light and a gladness to each other's existence! May He bless you all in your various means of deriving either innocent pleasure or moral improvement from the years which pass over you! May He make you prosperous in your affairs, and happy in your friendships!

Let these which are my wishes for you, be your hopes also; and with the cheerfulness which they may naturally inspire, bid your welcome to the new year which God has permitted to open upon you. Only let them be consecrated by the thoughts and recollections of Christian piety. Let them be your hopes in submission to the wiser appointments of God. Let them not so exclusively fix your attention on a happiness of your own imagining, and your own seeking, as to make you forget, that it may be the intention of God, by removing some of His gifts, and disappointing some of your expectations, to prepare you more thoroughly for a greater happiness hereafter.

And you on whom such trials may have already come, forget not the hopes and resolutions of that faith the trying of which worketh patience. Be it your hope and your prayer, for the days which may be in reserve for you, that "patience may have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Do you also look up to meet the coming year with the countenance of a religious cheerfulness, as knowing that all the years of your

appointed time are but successive ministers of a wise and merciful God, sent, whether they come with clouds or with sunshine, to be heralds of everlasting light and gladness to the upright in heart.

One wish and one hope there is, my fellow-Christians, in which we may all, as fellow-worshippers and members of the same Christian church, unite, while looking forward to the coming Sabbaths of the year on which we have entered;—and that is, that our meetings here may be increasingly productive of moral and religious benefit to us all—that we may more and more find them "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"—times of renewed strength to every holy principle, and sanctifying influence over the whole course of our daily lives—times of wholesome nourishment to the faith which worketh by love, and the hope which maketh not ashamed, and the charity which is the bond of perfectness.

God grant that this may heartily be our wish, and that by His blessing and help, it may be fulfilled!

AMEN.

DISCOURSE IX.

THE VOICES OF SPRING:

A May-day Sermon.

WHEREFORE, IF GOD SO CLOTHE THE GRASS OF THE FIELD, WHICH TO-DAY IS, AND TO-MORROW IS CAST INTO THE OVEN, SHALL HE NOT MUCH MORE CLOTHE YOU, O YE OF LITTLE FAITH?—Matt. vi. 30.

WE begin to-day, not only a new week, but a new month. And that month, in its general character, we are in the habit of welcoming as one of flowers and blossoms. It belongs more decidedly than its predecessor to the season of spring,—the season of so many bright and cheerful associations, especially in the minds of the young. Anciently, the first day of this month was considered as the boundary line between the confines of winter and summer; and in imitation of the contests which the former often keeps up with the latter beyond this boundary, a sportive warfare was wont to be carried on by youthful companies in the liveries of the respective seasons, always, of course, ending in the victory of

summer; which was then, with songs and wavings of green branches, triumphantly brought home.

Anciently, also, it was a very widely prevalent custom, and one which still longer continued, for companies of the young to go out very early on May-day morning into the fields and woods, and bring back garlands of flowers and branches of trees, with which to adorn the doors and windows of their houses. Nor were the young alone in their welcome to the genial season; for, as one old chronicler prettily tells us, "on May-day, in the morning, every man, except impediment, would walk into the sweet meddowes and green woods, there to rejoice their spirits with the beauty and savour of sweet flowers, and with the harmony of birds praising God in their kinde."* Traces of such ancient customs still remain, especially in the rural districts of our land; nor are even our large and busy cities altogether without them. And among the inhabitants of both town and country there will always be those for whom a quiet walk on a fine May-morning, or indeed on any such morning of the pleasant Spring-time, "into the sweet meddowes and green woods," will have its attractions and also its lessons.

For, however popular customs and observances may become antiquated and gradually pass away, whatever was healthy and pure, as well as natural, in the feelings which originated them, belongs to all times, and will, in all times, find some adequate ex-

* Stow, quoted by Brand.

pression. The season which our ancestors welcomed in their way, is not received without a welcome by us. It has also to us, as to them, its voices of invitation and promise, its voices that call forth both hope and remembrance, its voices of both admonition and encouragement, its voices in harmony both with exhortations to cheerfulness, and with counsels of wisdom. Let us listen, for a while, on this May-day forenoon, to some among these varied voices of Spring.

The younger portion of my hearers will, probably, have their attention more especially alive to what it promises. This harbinger of brighter and still brighter days to come, as the weeks shall go on ripening into the glow of summer, will naturally speak to those who are themselves in the spring-time of life, with not a few pleasant prophecies of the blessings and the joys which a later season will bring them. Its voice to them will be one in harmony with the hopes and wishes of their own hearts. Its flowers and blossoms will be likely to make them think of the cheerful aspects which human life and human homes can also wear, and that through a long succession of years, and, while so thinking, form to themselves pictures of their own future lot, in like fair and attractive colours.

Yet even to them the voice of Spring may also have its warnings, not to be too confident in any such hopes. It may even in them awaken recollections of the close resemblance which there sometimes is between the beauty of life's early promises, and the

withering grass, and the fading flower. It may recal to their minds some young companions of former days, who are no longer living to welcome with them its return. It may make them think of others who, even at this very time, though no older than themselves, are wasting away in the chamber of sickness with small likelihood of ever leaving it except for the grave. The sun of a May morning may shine in upon them through the windows of their sick-room, and flowers brought to them by their friends may still have a beauty and a sweetness to them as signs of the pleasant season abroad; but no more for them shall be the morning walk, no more shall their own hands gather flowers from field or garden. Even the young, I say, may hear such things said to them by the voice of Spring, amidst whatever else it may say in greater harmony with their natural hopes and wishes for themselves.

But to many of them, most probably, it will speak rather of no very distant future. It will speak of pleasures to be enjoyed before the present season shall have passed away. In this our large and populous city, for instance, how many thousands of young hearts are prepared to hail with gladness the now near at hand holiday and festival of Whitsuntide! How many thousands are sure to remember on this May-day morning, that only another fortnight has to pass, before that most welcome week of recreation will commence! How many are thinking already of the rest from labour, the social festivities, the plea-

sant country excursions, which they will once more enjoy! To them the voice of Spring, as promising a renewal of well-remembered pleasures, or perhaps to some a first experience of pleasures such as their older brothers and sisters have often told them of—to all these the voice of Spring is, doubtless, speaking cheerily. And the oldest and gravest among us, I should think, will hardly wish to cast a shade over whatever may be their delight in listening to its promises. No; we shall rather be inclined to say, may God bless their young hearts, and give them all possible enjoyment of their yearly holiday!

Nor is Spring without a voice of welcome promise to those who have long past the season of their youth. Though there may no longer be the same eagerness of hope in looking forward to a time of leisure and recreation, nor so much novelty in any pleasures which such a time may bring, yet, to many of us, the mere fact that every day is now placing us, for a while, at a greater distance from the chills and glooms of winter, and making more probable something like a steady continuance of warmer sunshine and milder breezes, is enough to give us a feeling of thankfulness and gladness that we have once more entered upon the month of May. Besides, I am not aware, at least I do not myself feel, that the pleasure with which we look upon the renewed beauty of earth and sky, and inhale the sweet fragrance of flowers, and listen to the merry voices of birds, necessarily grows less merely because

we have grown older. There may still be as clear a perception as ever of God's goodness in the works of His hands, and as warm a disposition as ever to bless Him for every sign of it in them which we see, or hear, or feel. In this respect, the old man's heart may be as young as that of a little child, when he walks abroad in the sunshine of a May morning. And though Spring brings not back to him the elasticity of his youthful step, nor all the buoyancy of his youthful spirits, nor the aptness of his youthful imagination to shape out bright visions of the years to come,—though life to him is now much more largely an experience of the past than a hope of the future, at least of this world's future;—yet he can look with a benevolent sympathy on those who are in the full enjoyment of their childhood and their youth, and derive pleasure in seeing much of his own history repeated in their feelings and their hopes.

As we grow older, indeed, we are more apt than when we were young, to be reminded by each returning season how much there is which does not return with it. We are more apt to see, in the short continuance of all that Spring and Summer make fair and bright to the eye, an emblem of the transient nature which also belongs to the beauty and glory of man, or, at least, to so much of that beauty and glory as is dependent upon his time of life. As years come on, we find more vacancies in our social and domestic circles. We are able to count fewer around us of those who began life with us. And

more likely is the voice of the season, at each of its returns, to ask us some questions about those who are no longer with us to welcome its arrival.

As we grow older, too, more likely is the same voice to suggest the possibility, that this present return of the season is the last which we shall witness—that before the earth shall again awake out of her winter sleep, and dress herself in the cheerful garb of Spring, before the trees shall again put forth fresh leaves, and the garden once more cause the things that are sown in it to spring forth, we shall ourselves have fallen into that sleep from which there is no awaking to this world's changes of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest.

Yes, this may be the voice which is speaking to some of us—a voice reminding us, that even as we now look around in vain for some who were our pleasant companions in the earlier stages of our journey, others will before long be missing us from the number of their fellow-travellers. And they who shall so miss us, may, in like manner, hear the voice of the same season, at one of its future returns, reminding them that they also must follow us.

How many times, in this ancient house of prayer, must remembrances and suggestions of this kind have been awakened in those who have here successively assembled! "Our fathers, where are they?" They who originally provided themselves here with a place where they might worship God according to the dictates of their consciences,—they and their

children and their children's children,—how are they all completely departed! Of whole congregations that have here met together, not even their dust, probably, now remains in the graves to which they were, one after another, consigned. Their monument is now, what was once their place, as it is now ours, of weekly meeting. We see around us the same walls which also surrounded them; the same ancient clock which numbered for them the hours of worship; the same venerable oak wood-work of pews and galleries which met their eyes;—but no return of Spring shall bring them back to their places here, any more than it shall restore the oaks which were cut down for the erection and adorning of this building to the forests where they grew, or cover them again with the foliage which once, at the bidding of the season, they put forth.

But for all of us, whether young or old, whether thinking of the past, or looking forward to the future, Spring has also another voice, as it doubtless had for our fathers—a voice of invitation and encouragement to cheerful trust in the wise and bountiful and fatherly Providence of God. It bids us observe how again, as in years past, He is covering the earth with verdure and beauty,—how He is again warming it with sunshine, and softening it with showers, and blessing the springing thereof,—how He is again preparing a rich reward for the labours of the husbandman, and, at the same time, providing abundant food for the birds of the air, which "neither sow nor

reap, nor gather into barns." It bids us, while observing these things, consider whether He is not likely to take all needful care of us, especially if we are mindful of the work which He has given us to do. It bids us heartily and cheerfully address ourselves to the performance of our respective duties, and face with a good courage our respective difficulties and trials, secure of His blessing on every earnest endeavour to extend His kingdom over our own hearts, and the hearts of our fellow-men.

And this voice of the season comes hallowed to us by the according exhortations of God's beloved Son; —exhortations which, we may well believe, though intended to strengthen us against anxiety, were not intended to furnish an excuse for indolence of either mind or body. They were addressed by Christ to those of his disciples, whom he was about to employ in a service that would need their whole time and attention. In proportion as they were faithful in that service, might they rely on God's Providence for taking due care of them. Theirs was to be a working, not an idle trust: and it is much the same now. God does not miraculously interfere to ward off from mere laziness and improvidence their natural consequences. He has not rendered unnecessary the exertions of human industry and skill. On the contrary, He accepts and requires such exertions for making the most of His bounties and mercies. He clothes with most beauty, and makes most productive, the fields and gardens which men most dili-

gently and carefully cultivate. He, too, gives the largest moral and spiritual harvests, where men bestow most culture on their own minds and hearts. He sends down His influences most abundantly, where they are most earnestly sought and most faithfully used. God would have His children without anxiety; but not by remaining without thought or exertion. He would have them do with all their might whatever their hand findeth to do, engage heartily in whatever service He may place in their way, give themselves up thoroughly to whatever may be the duties of their time and station,—and then quietly, unanxiously, full of hope and trust, rely on Him for taking all requisite care of their true interests.

Let this be to us, fellow-Christians, one lesson of the present season, one exhortation addressed to us by the voice of Spring; which, so exhorting, speaks only in close accordance with the lessons and exhortations of Christ. Let the birds of the air, as they sing their hymns of praise to their Creator,—let the grass of the field and the flowers of the garden,—let the trees putting forth their luxuriance of leaves and blossoms,—remind us of God's Providence, and repeat to us our Lord's mild remonstrance against an unfilial want of faith in the care of our heavenly Father. But let them also remind us of our duty as God's children, and Christ's disciples. God, in all the proofs which we see around us of His constant presence and agency, is working for the good of His creatures; and he would have man

also work, according to his abilities and opportunities, for his own good and that of his fellow-men. At least so Christ appears to have felt when he said, "my Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And in like manner, Christ's disciples, if really in harmony of spirit with him, will not only from God's fatherly goodness derive encouragement to repose on Him a filial trust, but will also, from God's continually active and beneficent Providence, infer their own duty of a constant endeavour so to use all His gifts, as will most tend to the true well-being of themselves and their fellow-men.

DISCOURSE X.

THE FADING FLOWER.

THE FLOWER FADETH.—Isaiah xl. 8. (part)

It is not from want of admonitions in the arrangements of Divine Providence, if we ever forget that "the fashion of this world passeth away." On the contrary, every thing, in this scene of our existence, appears intended to remind us of change and brief continuance. It is true, the heavens and the earth, in their great features, and in the laws to which they are subjected, remain the same from generation to generation. The sun, moon, and stars, it may be said, continue as at the beginning, to rule the day and the night, and never faint in their watches. The earth retains its proportions of land and sea, of mountain and valley, of hill and plain. But no day brings to us exactly the same portion of light and warmth as the preceding day; and no night shews to us exactly the same aspect of the heavens as the preceding night. Every hour, in fact, has its changes, which, if we attended to their admonition, might

keep us in continual mindfulness of the change which is going on in ourselves.

And even those things which are the least variable, and to which we seem justified in giving the epithets of fixed and durable, either betray, on closer examination, their own subjection to the same law of mutability, or awaken in us thoughts of the great and unceasing vicissitude, to which human affairs are subjected. The hardest rock of the "everlasting hills," as they are called, and may well seem to be, in contrast with man's short existence, itself shows traces of a time when its materials must have been brought together by some mighty change. And when we look up to the heavens, and think how many other beings are at the same moment enjoying their light, it is not unnatural to think also of the countless myriads, that, in quick and constant succession, have passed away, while the sun has continued to rise and set, and the moon has gone her monthly rounds, and the stars have kept their appointed courses.

The most obvious monitors, however, and at the same time the aptest emblems, of the change and decay to which man, and all the beauty and glory of man are inevitably doomed, have been found in those seasons and scenes and works of nature, which are themselves of short continuance and quick succession. In the rapidity with which seed-time gives place to harvest, and summer is followed by winter, we behold a resemblance to the brief duration of

each separate period of human life, even when lengthened out to its largest allotment of days and years. And, again, in the frequent blights of spring, and the storms which interrupt the sunshine of summer, we see images of the change which often comes on the early promise of man, and the griefs and troubles which are apt to mingle with his prosperity, and to cut short his rejoicing. And, again, when winter is spreading its desolation around us, and the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth,—we think, both how like this is to the general destiny of mankind, who must all disappear before the wintry blast of death, and how often also it furnishes an emblem of the dreariness which may quickly succeed in human hearts and human homes, to the cheerfulness of hope and the joy of affection.

Yes; "the flower fadeth"—and so have faded in succession all the pride, and all the prosperity, and all the pleasure, and all the plans, and all the enterprizes, and all the triumphs, of the generations that have gone before us. Like us, they toiled and schemed, they hoped and feared, they rejoiced and were sorrowful, they had their friends who valued them, and their enemies who harassed them;—like many of this generation, they laid up for themselves riches, they built themselves houses, they made to themselves a name, they rose to distinction and honour, they beheld also their children established and prosperous around them;—or, like others of this present time, they were brought low by affliction

and want, they endured vexation and disappointment, they mourned over the loss, or, far worse, the misconduct of children. But whatever was their lot, they are gone; their countless multitudes have all disappeared; the millions upon millions that have in succession occupied the earth, have no longer the least place on it,—like the grass they were cut down and withered, like the flower thereof they faded and passed away, and were undistinguishably mingled with the dust. Yea, probably, the least particle of the dust on which we tread, is more than all that now remains of the whole world's population in past ages. And so must the present inhabitants, much as they may boast themselves over their predecessors, and high-sounding as may be the names which they give to their stations or their achievements—so must they pass away, and all traces of them be lost in the darkness and mystery of the grave.

"The flower fadeth";—and such a flower is often the infancy of man. Brief and transient as is the longest term of his earthly existence, there are multitudes who see only the very beginning of it—who seem born only to die—who awaken the hopes of the parental heart, only to leave sorrow in their place. Like flowers, they are fair and pleasant to look upon; like tender and delicate flowers, we carefully watch and cherish and guard them;—but like flowers, also, they are often of short duration; they droop and wither before us; their little stock of life is soon spent; they are gone, and we see them no

more. And in this case, it is not the flower blooming for its natural season and then decaying; but the flower smitten by some unexpected blight, or assailed by a canker in its root, or cut down by the mower's scythe, that seems to us the fit emblem of the fate that consigns an infant to the grave.

"The flower fadeth";—and such a flower is, also, not unfrequently, the youth of man. The precarious age of infancy may have been safely past. The dangers of childhood may have been past. Health may have seemed a secured possession, and continuance of life a reasonable expectation. Light and cheerful may be the spirit with which the present is enjoyed, and bright the hopes with which the future is contemplated.—But, in a few days, or even in a few hours, how great may be the change! The countenance that was radiant with joyous animation is now settled into the paleness of death—the light is departed from the eyes—the bloom and sprightliness of youth are gone—the flower has suddenly faded.

"The flower fadeth";—and such a flower is sometimes even the most amiable character that can add to the attractiveness of youth. The affection of parents, the delight of friends may have been awakened, not merely by the natural graces of health and liveliness, not merely by the usual recommendations and ornaments of youth, but by qualities of mind and heart which they felt to be blessings, and from which they reasonably hoped for a long continuance of comfort and joy. They may have de-

lighted in the purity of mind, the sweetness of temper, the disinterested kindness, the ardent desire of doing good, which they beheld in combination with youth, and giving to it a peculiar grace and beauty. But these qualities, however they justified regard, could not secure continuance to the object of it: just as no rarity and richness of the flower can prevent the flower from fading.

"The flower fadeth";—and such is the change which oftentimes comes over the aspect of life as we advance in years. As we approach nearer to the real scenes and business of human existence, we miss many of those bright hues which a youthful imagination is apt to throw over the distant prospect. The world becomes less and less like a place intended by a benevolent Creator for the permanent residence of man. We see more of the great trials, the severe afflictions, to which man is made liable. We learn, amidst our own blessings, to rejoice with trembling. We learn to look upon others to whom the lines are fallen, for the present, in pleasant places, and especially upon those who are now at the outset of their course with a fair prospect before them—we learn to look upon them with a serious, and in some degree, a sad remembrance of life's uncertainties and changes. We go to the house of rejoicing, with hearts subdued and hopes chastened by the recollection, how often we have also gone to the house of mourning. It is true, we see around us many dear and valued friends; we know many homes that have the light of comfort

and gladness shining in them; we can number many great blessings in our own home and our own lot; we behold much promise of amiable and valuable qualities among the young; we rejoice in the present health and good promise of our own children; we acknowledge that our path through the world is bordered by many fair and pleasant flowers; but still a voice keeps whispering in our hearts,—"the flower fadeth."

"The flower fadeth";—and such is the change which must at last come upon us all. We may be spared to see many days. We may be preserved from many of the changes and calamities that happen to others. We may live to be old in the enjoyment of much bodily health, and in the possession of both bodily and mental faculties. We may not have the grief of seeing our children go down to the grave before us; or the still bitterer grief of wishing that we had laid them in an early grave, while yet uncorrupted by the world. But however prosperously and peacefully we may pass through life, a change must come at last. Darkness must descend upon our day. The winter of our existence must come, and, with its chilling breath, sweep away from our earthly prospect every relic and trace of our former summer, however bright and glorious it may have been. Yes, "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, when the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it"; and surely, "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field."

But I have not engaged you in these reflections, fellow-Christians, merely to leave on your minds a melancholy impression, or to indulge my own mind in a train of thought to which particular circumstances had disposed it. I have the further purpose of calling your attention to the soothing and inspiriting assurance, which we find in immediate connection with the text. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Without the counteracting influence of such feelings as are encouraged by this assurance, melancholy, indeed, would be the reflections in which we have been engaged. To look upon the calamities and sorrows to which human beings are subject; to look upon the ravages made by death among the dwellings of men; to behold their dearest hopes, their purest affections cut down and blighted, as they often are, by his chill and wintry breath,—and to see in these things only a resemblance to the withered grass and the faded flower,—might well be attended with a sadness and dreariness of heart, such as might be imagined in one who should now, for the first time, be a witness to the approach of winter, without knowing that the bareness and bleakness and desolation which it is spreading over the landscape, are not to last for ever. We can now behold the change which is going on in the face of nature without alarm or anxiety, because we have been accustomed to see it followed by the return of spring. We can tell ourselves that under all this appearance of devasta-

tion and death, there is, in reality, a powerful principle of life actively at work—that a secret preparation is even now going on, for the freshness and beauty and abundance of a future season. And there is strong ground for the presumption, that, if we knew as much of God's working in the moral, as in the natural world,—if we were gifted with a sight that could penetrate beyond the boundary of the grave, and could catch but a glimpse of the spring that succeeds to the winter of death;—equally without alarm, anxiety, or despondency, should we witness in others, and for ourselves look forward, to the change which comes upon all the bloom and brightness of this present life. Our thoughts would not then rest in the grave, but cheerfully go forward beyond it. And our recollections of those whom we have loved—our recollections of all the qualities by which they deserved our love—would make us think of their virtues and graces, not so much as of flowers that had faded and perished, as of flowers that had been carefully preserved and sheltered to bloom again in a more genial season.

In the meantime, we can make some approach to this calm and cheerful view of life's great change, by attending to the intimations and promises which we have of an immortal inheritance. What cannot yet be knowledge, may, at least, be a strong and growing hope. And not slight are the encouragements to hope, which even reason can give us on this important subject. Grant but the existence of a con-

siderate and merciful Providence, and even reason will venture to infer, that such a Providence would hardly have bestowed upon us our keen sensibilities, our strong and lasting affections, if the only effect of these things had been to increase the pains and griefs of our short existence. Yes, even reason will whisper that the uncertainties, the calamities, the changes, the disappointments of this world, would hardly have been so great and grievous—would hardly have been allowed to interfere so often and so largely with human comfort and enjoyment—if this world had been all that the Creator destined for man. There would not have been all this variety of moral discipline and cultivation—all this elaborate preparation, if we may so call it, for exercising the fortitude, and perfecting the patience, and drawing forth every nobler quality and energy of man—if his final destination had been merely the grave.

But it is not the grave. It is not this world that is to be the only scene of his existence. Reason bids us hope for more; and we have a more sure word of promise that there shall be more. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever." "And this," says a Christian Apostle, "this is the word which, by the gospel, is preached unto you." The promise, the assurance of immortality, is that enduring word of God with which we may comfort and strengthen our souls. The promise of Divine protection, the assurance of Divine care and mercy, we have also in that

same word of God. He who cannot err, has appointed all the changes to which we are made subject. He who cannot lie, has assured us that He will cause all things, both things present and things to come, both life and death, to work together for good to those who put their trust in Him.

"Trust, then, in Him at all times, ye people, pour out your hearts before Him; God is a refuge for us." "The flower fadeth,"—but the hope that grows out of Christian faith shall not fade. "The flower fadeth, and all the goodliness thereof passeth away",—but the graces of holiness and piety are not subjected to the same law of change and destruction. "The flower fadeth," and so must all the earthly bloom and beauty and glory of man;—but there remaineth yet a rest for the people of God—"yea an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away,"—"a home eternal in the heavens."

I wish that I could impress the value, the comfort, the power of this hope on the minds of all my hearers —that I could persuade them to take for their support and guidance through this changing and uncertain world, the Divine promise of another and everlasting inheritance. What, my friends, what have you to supply its place? Are you confident in your present ease and prosperity? Are you without care, because you are now in the season of health and strength? Do you feel that it is well with you, because you have many pleasures of this world at your command? Alas! the fate of all these things

is written in the words—"the flower fadeth." You that are rich, your riches cannot purchase for you a day's continuance of life. You that are young, your season of youth is fast passing away, and even now cannot secure you from the power of disease and death. You that are thinking only of amusements and pleasures, the days will come when you shall find no pleasure in them. The end of life must come. The account to be given of life must be rendered in. Judgment must come. The everlasting scene must be disclosed. Oh! fly for refuge to the hope that is set before you. Lay hold on eternal life. Enrich and strengthen your souls—prepare them for whatever may be the trials and sorrows of this world—secure them against the terrors of death—provide for them a ground of trust in the awful day of judgment, —by giving them an interest in that "word of God which shall stand for ever."

DISCOURSE XI.

NOVEMBER HINTS.

AND MAKETH THE DAY DARK WITH NIGHT.—Amos v. 8. (part.)

To put a voice into every work and appointment of God—to interpret that speech which day uttereth unto day, and that knowledge which night sheweth unto night—to make audible and intelligible every note of that harmony with which the changing seasons celebrate the Creator's praise,—is one among the noble offices of reason. For this we find it frequently employed by the Prophets and devotional poets of the Old Testament; and in this we find it delighting, when raised to its purest and most exalted state in the mind of Jesus Christ.

The minister of Christ, therefore, may well be allowed, according to his humble ability, to engage the assistance of nature in his business of moral instruction. He may be allowed to call upon his hearers to listen how the voice of the season speaks in concert with the voice of religion, and to borrow, if he can, an additional solemnity for the truths

which he has to teach from the gloom and shortness of a November day.

This is what it has occurred to me to attempt on the present occasion. The arrival of the season when the contracted hours of light hardly suffice for the public business of the Sabbath—when, instead of the cheerful radiance which the summer sun pours into the house of prayer, we can but dimly distinguish through the surrounding obscurity the forms of our fellow-worshippers,—appeared to me a natural time for seriously directing our thoughts to Him who "maketh the day dark with night," and for reminding ourselves of more important and awful, though not less certain changes, which are equally dependent upon His power.

1. It is a time for thinking of His power. He appointed and He maintains that order in the movements of this earthly globe, to which we owe the succession of the seasons. He fixed in its place—and what but His restraining hand can hold there—that central source of light and heat around which this ponderous mass is continually revolving. He keeps this and the other worlds which are continually moving around the same centre, at their proper distances from it, and from each other.

To the imagination how wonderful is the idea of an infinite space scattered over with suns, and worlds holding their course around them, all without confusion, without interruption from one another, without irregularity in themselves! And to the understand-

ing how powerful the conviction, that some restraining, guiding, and preserving influence, is constantly exerting itself among them! When we reflect seriously on the wondrous scene,—laws, principles, attractions, forces, are felt to be nothing more than different modes of stating the fact, that a great, an almighty, an intelligent Power is continually at work throughout the universe—that it is nothing but that Power which holds fast whatever is fixed and central, and moves whatever is in motion.

In close relation to the most stupendous exertion of that Power, are those changes which are things most familiar to our minds. Summer and winter, day and night, refer us to the revolutions of a world, and the varying aspect which, in its revolutions, that world presents to the sun. They refer us to the Almighty Creator, to the pervading Spirit of the universe. "He turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night."

If these changes were sudden, or if they were irregular, how ready should we be to acknowledge and to tremble at the power manifested in them. If this, for instance, were the afternoon of a summer day, and the sun should, nevertheless, be thus hastening to its setting—if the gloom which we now call natural and belonging to the season, were a premature coming-on of night, how awful would then appear its darkness! In what dread suspense should we await the issue of the miracle! how many misgivings, and alarms, and secret ownings of a

power above him, would there be, even in the heart of one who might have hardened himself to say, "there is no God"!—Or if, on the dim and dying twilight of a November afternoon, should suddenly burst forth the radiance of a summer morning—if, instead of the long winter night which we now expect, the sun should spring up again from his early-sought bed, and bring back the day which we thought departing, how would the mysterious change startle into seriousness and wonder, the most inattentive and insensible among us! How would the sudden splendour seem to fill the house of prayer with the presence, and the glory, and the power of God!

Yet, in fact, there would be required for such a change no greater exertion of power, than that which is at this very time going on, in making the day dark with night. The Almighty would have only to stop that which now has no motion but from His impulse, and to change an order which exists merely because He wills it. There would be no force to counteract, no agency to control, but His own. There would be no will to interfere with His; and there is no cause but His will, why the sun retains its place, and the earth continues in its orbit, and summer and winter, and day and night, succeed one another as in the beginning.

We should call, indeed, a deviation from this order, miraculous. But, surely, there needs not much reflection to make us acknowledge, that the preservation of the order is as wonderful, and proves as

much an exertion of power, as any supposed departure from it.

To create, and keep in harmonious action, all the component parts of the vast and complicated machine, is as truly a Divine work as to arrest or alter its movements.

2. Shall we think little of the power displayed in this work, because it is a work of kindness? For, surely, that very regularity which is so apt to lessen our wonder, is a call upon our gratitude as a proof of kindness. Think, for a moment, what our world would be, without that order in its yearly and daily variations which it now has—if, instead of successive seasons, for the most part gently melting into one another, and days whose hours of light can be accurately numbered beforehand, it were utterly uncertain whether spring or autumn, summer or winter, darkness or light, would be the portion of the morrow. Think of a world in which the whole year, nay, many years in succession, might be given up to the exclusive domination of one season, or in which the extreme of one might be instantly followed by the extreme of another—in which all the fierceness of summer might suddenly blaze out upon the earth when requiring the rest and shade of winter, and all the severity of winter fall with instantaneous blight upon the harvests of summer, or the ripening fruits of autumn. Think of a world in which we could, on no single day, promise ourselves that the sun then shining in the heavens would be there on

the morrow; at no single moment could be certain how much of the day remained. Think of watching the gathering glooms of evening, with an utter uncertainty whether the coming night might not endure for months, for years, for ever. Some of those adventurous voyagers who have passed a winter in the Arctic regions, have told us with what melancholy feelings they have watched the last ray of the setting sun, when they have known that weeks and months must pass before its light would visit them again. But they knew that its time was appointed for returning. How far more dreary would be the feelings which must accompany the thought, that it might be departing to return, if to return at all, after an absence to which even the night of a Polar winter would be short!

Yet such a world there might be, and in such uncertainties might consist its wonders, if unbounded power were all that belonged to the Creator. But "also unto God belongeth mercy." Because He is kind to the creatures of His hand, He exerts His power with a regularity sufficient to give them confidence in the continuance of His bounties, and only with so much variety as to exercise in them an improving care, foresight, and diligence.

Let not, then, the proof of kindness make us insensible to the power which it also proves; nor let us be less ready to acknowledge God to be wonderful and adorable in His appointments, because our advantage and comfort are considered in them—

because He has made our assurance as strong that "He turneth the shadow of death into the morning," as that "He maketh the day dark with night."

3. But beside the mingled power and kindness of which these changes in the appearances of nature should remind us, they may serve to us as hints of still more important changes, and of the order which in them also is appointed by the Creator. The life of man has also its seasons—its time of growth, maturity, and decay. The life of man has its rising, its meridian, and its setting sun. His "way of life" falls "into the sear, the yellow leaf." "His day is made dark with night."

But what is the regular succession to which we are accustomed in the appointments of God? If the year, after ripening into the rich glow of summer, fades away by gentle gradations into the darkness of winter—yet as constantly does it rise up again into the vigour and bloom of spring. If the day is made dark with night—yet as constantly are the shadows of night turned into the morning. Light after darkness, beauty and gladness after gloom and desolation, are as natural a succession as the contrary. Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that man also shall stand up again from the dust to which his body moulders?—that death is no more than a night which shall be turned into morning, a winter which shall be succeeded by a spring-time? One of our great poets has imagined man, on the first day of his existence, as thinking, when the "soft

oppression" of sleep began to seize upon his senses, that—

> "He then was passing to his former state
> Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve."

And, no doubt, if a human being, in the maturity of his faculties, were to be placed upon the earth by himself, he might naturally conclude that not only his own frame, but the whole scene around him, was to exist only for a day. He would see the sun gradually becoming lower in the heavens—he would see, after its disappearance, shade gathering upon shade—he would feel a torpor stealing over his senses; and what should assure him that this was not a final closing of the whole scene? Or if we were to imagine his experience to be extended, in like circumstances, to a whole year, though he would have learned to expect with confidence the return of morning after night, yet at the sight of all nature in decay,—with scantier supplies each day of light and warmth, as though the sun were beginning to be weary of his course—with more and more frequent and furious blasts of stormy winds, as though they would sweep from the face of the earth all traces of its productions—what should prevent the recurrence of apprehension that now, at least, the end of all things must be at hand? What should teach him that all this cold and darkness and desolation of winter, were merely preparatory for the resurreetion of spring?

Now is not death to us what night would be, what winter would be, to man, placed in such circumstances

as we have supposed?—nay, what night and winter have, at one period in his history, actually been to man? It was a discovery of experience that sleep is not destruction. It was equally a discovery of experience that winter is not destruction. Will not the analogy of the Divine appointments lead us on to some expectation of another discovery, to be also made by experience, that death is not destruction?

But we depend not for this expectation upon such analogies. We have been assured by our Maker himself, that life after death is as certainly an appointed succession in our experience, as light after darkness in the seasons and times of the present world. True; then what we need not for argument, let us attend to for warning. And when we think how unfailing is the power of our God, by which He "maketh the day dark with night," let us think that equally unfailing will be His power, to fulfil our expectation of a morning after the night of death.

4. We tremble not at the gloom which is now fast gathering around the close of this winter's day. We know it to be no more than seasonable and natural. We think of the comfortable homes to which we are going, and of the light and warmth and cheerful looks which await us by our own firesides.—But, my friends, have we any thoughts of equal power to comfort us, when God shall begin to make dark our day of life with the approaching shadow of death? Truly that darkness may

be made very deep and terrible. Thoughts of neglected duties, thoughts of unrepented wrongs and unkindness to our fellow-creatures, thoughts of habitual and cherished sins and impurities, thoughts of a mind consciously carnal, unfit for the society of holy beings, and shrinking from the judging eye of a holy God—all these can indeed give a gloomy and wintry aspect to the evening of life.—Suppose the fortunes and happiness of years were dependent upon your having accomplished some task allotted to you, before the going down of this day's sun. And suppose that you had delayed applying yourselves to the important business, till it became very doubtful whether you could finish it within the appointed time. How precious would every moment of this, your last day of opportunity, have been to you! With what anxiety would you have thought of its shortness! With what apprehension would you have observed the fast coming on of its decline! How would you have longed to be obeyed like Joshua, in saying, "O sun, stand thou still!"—and now when the time is past, when the sun is set, suppose the task unaccomplished—how dismal would the outward gloom have been made, by the shame and vexation and remorse of your own bosoms—by the thought that you must now spend that time in regretting, which you might have spent in enjoying, the happiness which was placed within your power!

But far short must this supposition come of the fearful and miserable reality in that man's mind, who

finds his day growing dark with the approaching night of death, while he is conscious that the proper work of the day has not been performed—who is summoned to the judgment seat of God with a heart at enmity with God, and to a spiritual and eternal state without a single affection, or desire, or hope, or idea of comfort, in unison with the prospect.

O my God! save me, I beseech Thee—save all who hear me, from such an evening of our day. Let there not then be darkness and horror in our souls. But let there be that faith, and those affections of purity and love and piety growing out of faith, which will give us all the consolation of the assurance, that Thou who makest the day dark with night, wilt also turn the shadow of death into a glorious morning.

My friends, if you have joined me in this prayer, join me also in the resolution to make life the gathering-time of good thoughts, and peaceful recollections, and dispositions allied to a hope blessed and joyful, for the time when our departure shall be at hand.

5. There is one more hint, of awful import, which we may take from this dying and gloomy light of a winter's day. "He maketh the day dark with night." And that same power must be able to darken with terrors which are now inconceivable, the future day of the obstinately and impenitently wicked. Whatever may be our hope of their ultimate destination, yet long and fearful must first, if the Scriptures are to be believed, be the day of their chastisement. Truly they will find it a terrible thing to fall into the

hands of the living God. They will find that to them "the day of the Lord is darkness and not light —even very dark, and no lightness in it."

Do we shudder at the idea of awaking from the sleep of death to the morning of such a day? Oh that knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would persuade our souls to make their peace with Him, while he yet waiteth to be gracious; and that giving up ourselves to His guidance, we might be continually advancing towards that love which casteth out fear!

Once more, then, my friends, join me in the resolution, to live in humble and obedient remembrance of our God. And when the light of this mortal life shall be receding from our eyes, even as the last feeble glimmering of day is now fast retiring from us, may we remember this resolution with the satisfaction of having kept it, and thus be enabled to reckon among the profitable employments of our thoughts, this present direction of them to Him who "maketh the day dark with night."

DISCOURSE XII.

THE LIKENESS OF OUR YEARS TO A TALE THAT IS TOLD.

WE SPEND OUR YEARS AS A TALE THAT IS TOLD.—Psalm xc. 9. (part.)

In this mingled season of business and festivity* it is not, perhaps, likely, that many of my hearers have found leisure for meditations in accordance with these words of the Psalmist. Yet among those who have their hearts open to all the cheerfulness of the season, and among those, also, whose minds are necessarily and laudably attentive to the demands of their worldly occupations, there may be some who will not let the year pass away from them without giving some heed to its suggestions of serious and improving thoughts. Indeed, in the most festive company of friends and relatives that can, at this season, be assembled in the light of the same hearth, there seldom fail to be some hints of the changes which are continually taking place in the story of human life. Cheerful and friendly as may be the countenances around us, the number can hardly be

* The closing days of the year.

so complete as to leave no room for the thought of others far away, or the present enjoyment so great as to prevent all looking back to pleasant days that can return no more. And the man of business, when he rests from the fatigue and anxiety of his calculations—when he has struck the balance of his accounts, and closed the book of his worldly studies for another year,—may give a serious and useful thought to the transitory nature both of his years and their employment.

In any case, the few observations which I would this morning offer to your attention, whether they strike in with impressions already made upon your minds by the season itself, or only tend to prepare you for more readily receiving its impressions, will hardly be deemed unsuited to the last Sabbath of the year.

The direction given to our meditations by the words of the text, is to the years that are gone; and that is also a direction of them natural enough when a great division of our time is just approaching to its close. For though it might easily be made to appear as reasonable to send our thoughts forward at such a season, as to keep them looking back, yet it is more consistent with our common feelings and practice to let them pursue the steps of the retreating year while it still remains in sight, and to make the actual commencement of a new year the signal for their turning in the direction of new hopes and new resolutions.

One obvious subject of reflection when we are

thinking of by-gone years, is the rapidity of their succession. How long and tedious soever any portion of them may have seemed in anticipation—how great soever may have appeared before-hand the occasional distance between the formation of our schemes and their accomplishment,—yet, as if the same space contracted its dimensions after being passed over, we look back in vain, from the most advanced point of our progress, for that length of vista which had stretched before us in prospect. It is as though we were travelling with a mist continually before us, that increases the apparent remoteness of every object in front of us, while, clearing away from the path along which we have passed, it leaves so distinct a view of the point from which we set out, as to make us think it still nearer every time that we look back. The conclusion of a year is an actual measure of our progress—a mile-stone by the way-side of life's onward journey—correcting the delusion of imagination, though it does not always prevent the question of surprised and unwilling conviction, "is it possible that we have advanced so far?"—And then, not unfrequently, are heard complaints of life's shortness, from the very same persons to whom, in its details, it has often been a burthen. Then, too, come reflections on the quick succession of its years, in the same minds, a great part of whose contrivance and task, perhaps on almost every day, has been to help on its lagging hours. The wisest, however, though, by their regular

employment of its opportunities, they may not have found it too short for many valuable purposes, and though, by their attention to its duties, they may have secured themselves from feeling any hour of it wearisome, will join in the same confession of the rapidity with which it passes away. They will acknowledge that, with respect to this fleeting nature of our years, "we spend them as a tale that is told." Yes, they are gone like the words which we have listened to from the relater of a story. They are vanished like the scenes and events and characters, which have owed a momentary existence to the narrator's fancy. They are passed away like the successive incidents and images that have flitted before us—moving us, perhaps, alternately to laughter and to tears—in the pages read for the amusement of a winter's evening.

But the fleeting nature of our years is not their only point of resemblance to "a tale that is told." The comparison holds good also with respect to the little trace which is often left in the memory, of seasons and events which have once been present, and at the time, perhaps, deemed important. The story of our past lives is continually losing something of its particularity. No stretch of memory can extend to the thoughts and feelings of infancy, and how few are the individual hours or incidents which it can recal of childhood! Even youth, though peculiarly the season of deep impressions and vivid sensations, passes away without leaving much more

than a general recollection; while the monotonous cares and business of manhood, the daily routine of duties and of pleasures, spreads over the surface of the past so much uniformity of appearance, that but a few objects stand out from that season to the particular notice of memory. It may be for this reason, among many others, that the mind of age so easily glides over the whole intervening distance which separates it from youth and early manhood, and passing over times and events which excited only a portion of an attention evenly distributed among many subjects, singles out for a clearer and more complacent contemplation its few recollections of a more animated season;—just as, in an evening prospect, the eye glances over the level and dusky uniformity of nearer scenes, to the eminences, however few and distant, that are still glittering with the light which has forsaken the plain.

It is not meant by anything which has been said, that the whole of the past life is reduced in time to little more than a vague consciousness of having lived. This could be true only of minds little raised above the condition of the brute creation. Every one, probably, and still more probably, every one possessed of intellectual tastes, and acquainted with the pleasure which flows from the exercise of refined affections, can number, among the treasures of the past, individual recollections which lose nothing of their distinctness, or of their value, by the lapse of time. He can look back to green and sunny spots

in the wide waste of memory, which are always there, whenever he turns to them, in all their verdure and their brightness. He can also, it is probable, number recollections, sufficiently distinct, of darker scenes and more melancholy seasons. He has not forgotten how he felt when his heart was full with the bitterness of its grief. He can recollect what it was to look around from the thought of joy that had been, to dreariness and desolation come in its place. Both pleasure and sorrow can occasionally fix the past indelibly in the remembrance. They can both write passages in the story of life which no length of time, or difference of subsequent condition, can deprive of their vividness or their interest.

But what are such passages compared with the whole substance of the history? What are they but fragments of a volume, the greater portion of which has perished? Let a man ask of his memory, the exact order of his thoughts on any day of the year that is about to close. Nay, let him set it the easier task of recalling the most common occurrences, on any day as little remote as he pleases—of exactly enumerating the persons whom he saw, the words that he heard or uttered,—and he will soon be enabled to judge how far he can consider himself as possessing a perfect story of his life,—he will soon find that, not only the particulars of days, but even any tolerable account of whole weeks and months, nay and years, are beyond the power of his memory to recal. A general impression of its character, with a few striking

passages, will be all that he will find remaining in his mind. And thus he will resemble one who has been listening to a long and varied story, and who can tell whether it has been dull or interesting—can recal, probably, the names of the principal personages introduced into it—has not forgotten the nature and order of the main events,—but who, if asked to repeat it, could give only a meagre abstract of the original narrative, with the exception, perhaps, of a few scenes or incidents that had particularly seized upon his attention. So true it is that, in respect also to the traces left by them on the memory, as well as to their fleeting nature and quick succession, "we spend our years as a tale that is told."

But it is a subject of more serious and certainly more important consideration—more important from the effect which may be hoped from it upon our use of remaining opportunities—that the years which are passed and a story which is told, have another point of resemblance, in the equal impossibility of so recalling either the one or the other as to substitute something else in their place. The actions which have accompanied the progress and decided the character of our past lives, can no more be a second time proposed to our choice, or be in any manner brought under our power, than words which have once been uttered can come back again to be unsaid. He who has once told his tale, has no power to take out from the minds of his hearers every trace of its having been told;—it is gone from him, and its effect

on them is beyond his control;—he cannot now separate it from any thought or shade of thought with which in them it may have combined itself. However he may be answerable for the impression which he has made, he is no more master of it or of its consequences. And, in like manner, to all our regrets for mistakes which we have committed—to all our wishes that any events or seasons of our lives could come over again, in order that we might alter our conduct in them, and read a more pleasing story to ourselves in the book of our remembrance,—to all such regrets and wishes, it is still the inexorable language of the past, "what I have written, I have written."

There surely should be some motive in a thought like this to take care that the seasons and opportunities which are yet in our power, may be made materials for a more satisfactory continuation of the story—to take care that the present be not allowed to swell that catalogue of accusations, which we so little like to find written in the past against us. It is true, we may tell ourselves, on the authority of revelation, what we should hardly venture to hope on the authority of reason alone, that a sincere repentance can free us from the guilt of the past, and secure us from the more awful consequences of guilt. But besides that the sincerity of repentance must always be questionable, in proportion to the time of its being wilfully delayed, it no where appears that, when sincere, it is to be followed by a total forget-

fulness of all that needed to be repented of. If not, the very conversion of heart, the change of the whole mind in its moral tastes and habits, the new creation of the spiritual man, which is the natural evidence, because the proper work of a genuine faith and a thorough repentance,—this new furnishing of the soul must itself increase the distaste for every act in the past life which cannot approve itself to the conscience. He, therefore, that would at any time aspire to the enjoyments of virtue, cannot too soon put an end to all acquaintance with vice. He cannot break too short the story of forbidden courses. How great soever may be his expectations from the power of religion, he cannot in any doctrine, whether real or only pretended, of religion, find what, in the book of remembrance, will fill the place of a well-spent life. There can be no thorough substitute for a conscience void of offence—nothing that will give all the peace, all the serenity, which must be felt in the answer of a good conscience toward God. The more we can do towards providing ourselves with this answer, the greater evidence shall we give of a genuine faith. But without this answer, with minds full of accusing recollections, with a continual accumulation of heavy burthens and disfiguring stains upon our souls; how are we sure that a late, even though it be a sincere repentance, can ever secure us from fearful misgivings, or prevent us from vainly wishing to the last, that we could live over again the years of our past lives?—In the acknowledged vanity

of such a wish, let us seek a motive to a right employment of all remaining opportunities. To increase the urgency of all other incitements to use the present well and wisely, let us remember that "we spend our years as a tale that is told," and that neither events which have once happened, nor words which have been once uttered, can come over again to be, in the least degree, altered or amended.

Besides these points of resemblance suggested in our text, there are also points of difference which have hardly less tendency to urge the same important lesson. The tale that is told, whether interesting or not, whether more or less remembered, may be one with which we have no connection. But the story which our years, as they successively pass, are continuing, is our own. Every one of them is an additional chapter in our own history. The errors which that history records, its misfortunes, its pleasures and its griefs, its dangers and its hopes, are our own. We, at least, are the principal personages in its scenes and incidents. Every thing in it has some reference to ourselves. The tale that is told, too, is completed. The relator's and the hearer's business with it is over. It has answered its purpose, and may be laid aside—perhaps, may be soon altogether forgotten. But our years are busy with a story, the completion of which is still a matter of awful uncertainty. Nay, even what we often look to as its end, will only be a transference of the events and scenes to be comprehended in it to new circum-

stances and relations of existence. What will be the character of its continuance here, and still more in what strain it will be taken up hereafter, may well be questions to make us pause and consider.

Again, there is no necessity for us to make any other tale that has been told, a subject of renewed reflection and interest. But the story which our years are telling, is one that, we are assured, must be brought under our revived and most attentive consideration. The days and months and years that are but faintly traced, or have left only scattered and scanty fragments of their history in the book of our present remembrance, are all elsewhere recorded in true and indelible characters. The judgment which will be founded on that faithful record will comprehend, not only what we can now recollect, but much also that we have forgotten. Nothing that has had the least share in the progress by which we have made ourselves what we are, can be unremembered by Him "unto whom all hearts are open," and "who knoweth our thoughts afar off."

Truly there is much reason for the question, "who can understand his errors?" and for the prayer, "cleanse thou me from secret faults."

But faults and errors will not be the only things remembered by Him whose judgment goeth forth in mercy. If the story of our years bear testimony also to the secret and fervent prayer of piety, to the anxieties and strict vigilance of humility, to the self-denial and temperance of faith, to the desires and

labours of charity,—these things will not fail to be found in the book of His remembrance, yea, even if many of them have, for the present, faded from our own. Their whole history, how faintly soever written on any page to which memory can now turn, is stereotyped on that which the stronger light of another world will enable us to read.

It must, naturally, be our wish, that our years, as they successively pass, may add abundantly to a history which we shall then have pleasure in reading. It must be our wish that the tale which they will have at last to tell, may not be an idle and unprofitable one, but that it may be full of matter for pleasant and thankful contemplation, and such as may give rise to a consciousness of having also the approbation of our heavenly Father.

Let us then, my fellow-Christians, endeavour to profit by every hint of each succeeding season, for considering the past with a view to the improvement of the present. Let us give serious entertainment to every thought that can strengthen our motives to such improvement, whether it be a thought included among those that have now been suggested, or any other which may be awakened in our minds by the remembrance, that "we spend our years as a tale that is told." A tale that is told may not be one of very long continuance. It may not contain many strange or striking incidents. It may not be one revealing scenes of great earthly splendour. It may be a very short and simple story, and yet by the

beauty of character and nobleness of principle and purity of feeling displayed in it, a deep interest and a lively sympathy may be excited in our hearts. We may feel, not merely that we have been amused and delighted, but that it has done us lasting good.—Even so may the story which our years are telling, be one tending to the improvement as well as pleasure of those among whom we live. It is but a brief history as yet which the years of my younger hearers have written. But histories no longer than theirs have often contained much that is beautiful—much that is of unspeakable interest to those who recollect how much depends upon the manner in which the early season of life is spent. A new chapter in the history of us all is about to open with the new year. It deeply concerns each one of us what shall there be written in addition to the past. But it most concerns, perhaps, those against whom the past has yet had least to record, to use their utmost care for preserving the pages of their continued story unblemished by anything which afterwards they will in vain wish to obliterate. Yes, my young friends, let your history, as from month to month and year to year it goes on, unfold successively in your conduct and character fresh proofs that you have learned for what purposes you have been placed in this state of existence, and that you are seriously and earnestly set on doing your best, with the help and blessing of God, to fulfil them. Let it be a history such as they who most love you, and whose hearts you have

so much power to gladden or to grieve, will delight to make the subject of their attention. And if it should be cut short, still let it be one which, in its evidence of your preparation for another and nobler existence, will dwell with a peculiar power of consolation on the memory of affection.—On you, and on all of us, may this last Sabbath of one year leave an impression fitted to make us enter with wise and holy resolutions on another; and through that, as well as all the years which may succeed it, may the blessing and guidance of our heavenly Father be continually with us,—so that if we still "spend our years as a tale that is told," it may yet be as a tale displaying the beauty and dignity of human life, when governed and sustained by a regard to the will of God, and a filial reliance on His love and mercy. AMEN.

DISCOURSE XIII.

LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF GOD.

I WILL HEAR WHAT GOD THE LORD WILL SPEAK.—Psalm lxxxv. 8 (part).

VARIOUS are the circumstances, and various must be the spiritual wants, of those who meet together in the same house of prayer. Even though they should all be "of one heart and of one soul" in the desire to worship God, and to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ, yet they cannot all bring the same feelings and recollections to mingle with their devotional exercises, nor all have exactly equal need of the very same lessons from their great Teacher. They who are come with spirits weighed down by the recent experience of sorrow, or with minds harassed by a large mixture of difficulties and cares in their daily life, can hardly be so well prepared to join in songs of thankfulness and joy, as they who are come from homes in which they have had little of either grief or anxiety to disturb their peace. And, on the other hand, the plaintive strains and mournful prayers which are suited to the disquieted and troubled soul, are likely to be little

in harmony with the gladsome feelings of those who, as yet, have known few or no changes in their bright day of life.—Then, again, how different must be the kinds of instruction and exhortation which the different minds, ages, characters, conditions—all brought together in any large assembly of human beings—require to have addressed to them. Some there are likely to be, who need to be roused from a state of comparative insensibility to the real claims of God and duty—who can hardly be said to have had a true moral and religious life awakened in them. Others, probably, there are, who have long thought themselves religious, but are unconsciously deficient in some things without which their religion is little better than in vain. Others there may be, who have made considerable progress in the pursuit of things good and excellent, but who are in danger of resting satisfied with their actual attainments, and need to be disturbed in their dream of self-content, and reminded that the race is not yet ended. Others, again, truly and deeply sorrowing for past omissions and transgressions, earnestly desirous of leading henceforward a better life, but feeling their weakness, and almost ashamed to renew resolutions which have often been broken, have need of the words that shall cheer, comfort, and strengthen them in their best wishes and purposes. And besides all these, there are the individual griefs, anxieties, perplexities, apprehensions, in relation to each one's own peculiar circumstances and connections—those burthens and

bitternesses of heart which the heart alone that feels them knoweth—and which all have their corresponding requirements of healing and help from the great Physician and Comforter of souls.

On this account there may sometimes appear not a little to be said for that mode of public worship which prevails in the Society of Friends—for those silent meetings together in the presence of God and in communion with Christ, where, while all may have their individual devotion heightened by the consciousness of a general sympathy, each heart may also, according to its own especial experience and wants, whisper forth its praises and its prayers, and then wait, in the calm of thoughts which faith and devotion have quieted, to "hear what God the Lord shall speak."

Yet it is not necessary to make any change in our usual forms of public worship, in order to find in them much of this individual suitableness and application. It is necessary only that each should come as a worshipper of God, and as a disciple of Jesus. It is necessary only that, when we join in praise, we should each call to mind our respective experience of God's goodness; and when we join in prayer, we should each ask that which we each feel needful; and when we listen to the words, whether of Divine wisdom or of human exhortation, we should each be ready to receive and apply whatever we can bring to bear on our own respective conditions and characters.

To those who come to the house of prayer with

hearts and minds thus prepared and disposed, God will be likely to speak some word adapted to their particular circumstances. He will be likely to speak it, either through what they shall hear with their outward ears, or through the direction given to their own inward thoughts.

But the Psalmist's language in the text is expressive of a resolution well worthy of being adopted by us, not only in reference to the state of mind in which we should individually come to these assemblings of ourselves together, but in the much larger sense of a determination to take, on all occasions, a religious view of our respective conditions, experiences, and duties. In connection with all things that happen to us, be they of a joyful or of a sorrowful character—in connection with our times of both ease and trouble, quiet and anxiety, there are lessons to be learned, of which we shall be likely to be reminded in proportion as each one of us shall really have desires and purposes in accordance with those words of the Psalmist, "I will hear what God the Lord shall speak."

For let us believe, my fellow-Christians, with full assurance of faith, that God has not ceased to speak within the human heart, wherever humility and devotion have made a calm in which His voice can be heard. There is a silence of mind, when all thoughts are hushed but those which whisper the reality and awfulness of His presence; and when His spirit, informing and enlightening conscience, quietly gives

us understanding to know what He requires of us. He is not merely a God "who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," and who in later days "hath spoken unto us by His Son," but a God also who retains His power of directly communicating with the human soul, and giving it light for its guidance, refuge from its troubles, and comfort in its sorrows.

To believe this of God—to believe it as much now a truth as ever—that, if we draw nigh unto Him, He will draw nigh unto us; if we seek Him, He will be found; if we ask of Him help to know and do and bear His will, we shall not ask in vain,—to believe this is, surely, to have a good reason for keeping alive in our hearts such a resolution as that expressed in the words, "I will hear what God the Lord shall speak."

And now let us consider a little how an earnest desire and purpose of this kind will be likely to affect our views and conduct, in relation to the particular circumstances and experiences of our respective lots.

1. Let us take, first, the case of those who are living in the enjoyment of many earthly blessings, with few causes of anxiety or apprehension, and with few trials of their patience. In ordinary times it is the lot which falls to no inconsiderable number of human beings. Life in its general aspect, is surely of a cheerful character. Its earlier years, more especially, have, for the most part, a bright and joyous look. And in its later seasons, how much appearance it often retains of, at least, ease and comfort.

But what is the spiritual danger to be most dreaded for those, whose temporal lot is of this quiet and pleasant kind? Is it not, that they will look at it too much with reference to the use which they can make of it for their own advantage and enjoyment? Is it not, that, like the rich man in the parable, they will be too apt to hear a voice within them, congratulating them on the goods which they have laid up for many years, and bidding them take their ease and be merry?

Surely they will be wise to provide themselves with a defence against this danger. And a very effectual defence seems offered to them in the resolution, to "hear what God the Lord shall speak." Yes; for He will have much to say in reference to the use which they ought to make of His gifts. Not that they may think only of themselves, has he been so bountiful to them. Not that they may lead a life of self-indulgence, and insensibility to the wants and woes and interests around them, has he blessed them with health and strength and abundance. On the contrary, He would have them show their thankfulness to Him by their alacrity and activity in doing kind service, as they have opportunity, to their fellow-men. He would have them "ready to distribute, willing to communicate," and neither grudging of their aid nor sparing of their exertions, whenever good is to be done which He has given them power to do. He would have them remember and imitate the graciousness of His be-

loved Son; yea, He would have them even imitators of Himself, the bountiful and merciful God, and rejoicing most when they can most act as His stewards, and representatives in works of usefulness and beneficence.

Of this kind will be the admonitions and exhortations which they will hear addressed to them in the secret chambers of their minds, if they will only, with quiet and faithful attention, listen there for "what God the Lord shall speak."

2. Nor will His voice be silent for the encouragement and direction of those, whose lot is of a less easy and pleasant kind. And many there doubtless are, in this uncertain and ever changing world, whose circumstances are likely to give them frequent occasion for anxiety. They are "careful and troubled about many things," apparently from the very necessities of their condition. Nay, even their consciousness of duty to others, their love for those who depend on them, and their earnest desire to do all they can for preventing hardship and privation from falling on those to whom they wish only good, may add to the number and intensity of their cares. Their danger is of sinking under the weight of their anxieties. But for them, too, is provided a defence against their danger, if they will only keep an opening in their minds for the entrance of God's peace-breathing spirit—if they will only, as often as they feel their hearts disquieted and cast down within them, retire into communion with Him, and shutting

out, for a while, the voices of their earthly needs and perplexities, humbly and hopingly listen for what He shall speak. Something, surely, He will be likely to speak, in the way of exhortation to patience, to courage, to trust in His own goodness and Providence. Something He will be likely to speak, that will tend to lessen the seeming importance of things seen and temporal—to lessen the magnitude of apprehended evils that can affect only the condition in a world, the fashion whereof is quickly passing away—and to bring into remembrance the possible subserviency of all such evils to spiritual and enduring good. Yes; for those who have resolution enough not to be always listening to what cares and fears about the things of this life may be whispering—nor to be always dwelling amidst thoughts of this world's necessities and interests—but to have their times of refreshment in the presence of the Lord, when they may pour forth their hearts unto Him, and then in reverential silence hearken to what He shall speak,—for them there is sure to be a voice from Him which will speak peace unto their souls.

3. From Him, too, there will often be a voice of useful admonition, of wise suggestion, of timely warning, of mild persuasion, for those who, desirous of living amidst their fellow-beings, and especially with the friends and inmates of their homes, in the manner best fitted to make such intercourse productive of its highest good and purest joy, resolve to cherish, as much as possible, a religious sense of

their social and friendly duties—resolve to ask frequent counsel of God, how to conduct themselves in those various relations, and in the holy light of His presence and His love to examine their own feelings and dispositions to their fellow-men. The resolution to "hear what God the Lord shall speak" in reference to the claims which others have, and especially which those whom we are most bound to love and benefit have, upon our kindness and consideration, upon our gentleness and forbearance, upon our care not to grieve where we should gladden, nor to injure where we should help,—such a resolution, steadily carried into practice, cannot possibly be without a beneficial influence upon what we say and do, or even allow ourselves to think and feel, in relation to those amongst whom we live. The more frequently and closely we walk with God before we come forth to our intercourse and converse with men, the more likely shall we be to have His loving and merciful spirit with us, to "keep our tongues from evil, and our lips from speaking guile," to repress the hasty word and subdue the angry feeling, and to make us circumspect in all our conduct and conversation, lest we exercise for evil an influence that ought to be for good, and cause a brother to offend whom we ought to encourage and aid in abiding by the right and the true.—Yes; God has a voice to teach us how best to live for those whom we love—how to make the various relations in which we stand to our fellow-beings most productive of mutual benefit,—and that

voice will not be silent in the hearts which are accustomed to wait in humble reverence and stillness to hear what He shall speak.

4. Nor will that same voice fail to make itself heard for consolation in times of sorrow by those who, at such times, as well as in their seasons of gladness, direct their thoughts to God, and, in quietness of mind, humbly wait to learn from Him their duty, and to receive from Him the needed help for submitting to His will. No doubt it is sometimes a very bitter cup of which affection, of the purest and tenderest kind, is made to drink. Naturally, in proportion to the depth and strength of the love which has been awakened in us, and the greatness of our delight in the object of it, is the grief attendant upon our loss of what was so pleasant and dear to us. And, perhaps, if we take counsel only of our grief, it may discourse to us too much upon the change which that loss has made to us. But if we resolve also to "hear what God the Lord shall speak"—if we retire into quiet and humble communion with Him,—we shall not wait long before some word of His will drop, like a healing balm, upon our hearts, and give them new strength to bear what, we shall remember, is, after all, the infliction of His fatherly hand. Perhaps He will open to us a fountain of peace, in the very affections whence has arisen our sorrow. Perhaps He will teach us, by the strength of the tender and compassionate feelings awakened in our hearts, more than we ever understood before

of what is meant by His fatherly pity and loving kindness. Perhaps in the deepened conviction that a God so gracious and merciful can have no pleasure in afflicting us, He will prepare us for the readier admission of the faith, that it must be good for us to have been afflicted.—But surely, in some way, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation will speak for the comfort of those who, in their sorrow, made it one of their first resolutions to turn unto Him, and wait patiently for Him, and hear what He shall speak.

5. I need hardly add that a like resolution must be advisable for us all, whatever be our circumstances, as one means of strengthening our defences against temptation. The danger of forgetting our duty—of preferring some way of our own inclinations to that marked out for us by God—is one to which we are all liable, let our differences of condition, age, and experience, be what they may. If not even God's holiest and best beloved Son was left unassailed, how much less can any of his followers hope to go through life untempted.—But in the pure and filial mind of Christ, the voice of the tempter was heard with an instant recollection of what God had also spoken. And much less frequently would that insidious voice have power to make men think evil good, if, before acting on its suggestions, there were a pause allowed for calm and serious thought, and if in that pause the resolution were awakened, "I will hear what God the Lord shall speak."

I would observe, in conclusion, that it will be a great help to our fulfilment of such a resolution, or, in other words, to our religious consideration of our respective circumstances, experiences, duties, and dangers, if we have taken care to store our minds with the many beautiful and solemn expressions of great truths and principles which abound in the Scriptures. We shall thus be likely, in our times of quiet meditation and devout communion, to hear them repeated by a voice within us, and to recognise in that voice God again speaking for our instruction and benefit. It will also be a great help to our religious consideration of all things that happen to us, and of our duties in relation to them, if we have been careful to have our times of retirement from worldly thoughts for the purpose of earnest prayer, or, perhaps I should rather say, if we have been careful to preserve, at all times and in all circumstances, a prayerful disposition of mind. We read of Christ as retiring, occasionally, even from the company of his chosen disciples, and apparently that he might be alone with God. We read of him as, when thus alone, spending his whole time in prayer. And it is easy to think of him as, at such seasons, hearing with peculiar distinctness the voice of God within him, instructing and encouraging him for the work which he had to do, and the sufferings which he had to endure. But his whole history is that of one, who, let him be where he might, and engaged how he might, had God ever present to his remem-

brance, and his mind in constant readiness to hear what God should speak. This characteristic of our great Master should also be among the high aims of his disciples. Nor is it altogether beyond our power. We, too, in the midst of society, in the midst of our occupations, in the midst of our enjoyments (provided that they be of an allowable kind), and certainly in the midst of our trials, can, if we will, keep a place in our minds for God. We can, amidst whatever may be our other thoughts, preserve a thought for Him, and that thought may be, according to our circumstances at the time, a thanksgiving for His bounties, or a prayer for His help and counsel, His guidance and support. But, perhaps, just in proportion as we come nearest, in this respect, to the mind which was in Christ, we shall also be likely to have, as he had, our more especial times of retirement and communion with God, when, in the light of His felt presence, we may more closely examine our ways and our doings, and with respect to the great questions of our future duties, prepare ourselves, with deepest stillness and reverence of soul, to "hear what God the Lord shall speak."

Let me hope that His voice has not been altogether silent in any of our hearts at this time, but that we shall each of us carry away with us some word of His, to dwell in our remembrance, and quicken our desire and disposition to make Him our guide, our stay, and our consolation.

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE RICHES OF FAITH.

HEARKEN, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, HATH NOT GOD CHOSEN THE POOR OF THIS WORLD RICH IN FAITH, AND HEIR OF THE KINGDOM WHICH HE HATH PROMISED TO THEM THAT LOVE HIM?—James ii. 5.

WHEN we have been at all seriously considering what it is which a disciple of Christ is encouraged to believe of both the present and the future, we may well wonder that the anxieties and sorrows of this world should ever be able long to discompose him.

He is assured that every circumstance and change of the present transitory scene are so ordered, by infinite wisdom and goodness, as to be capable of contributing to future good. He is assured of having always nigh unto him an Almighty Father, ready to be his help and comforter. He is assured that there is an everlasting world in reserve for him, the glory and happiness of which, to those who love God, will be far greater than the heart of man can now conceive. He has, in fact, the path to a heavenly home laid open, and heavenly voices inviting him to

walk in that path, and the brightness of immortality shining in the direction to which it leads. How can his soul be ever, for any long continuance, cast down and disquieted?

And yet, when we look at those who profess to believe what Christ has taught of both the present and the future, how often do we miss the indications which we might expect of their reliance on a fatherly Providence, and their hope of immortality! How many seem unconscious of the imperishable treasures offered to their acceptance! Their bearing is not that of God's immortal children—of those who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love Him." Theirs is not the cheerful aspect of those, who know that they have another and a better country in heaven. Their belief seems rather to be, that all which they can hope or fear, all at least which deserves their most eager hopes and lively fears, is comprised within the limits of their earthly existence.

If we were to see a man toiling, with such poor and scanty materials as he might pick up by the way side, to build himself a miserable hovel, and fretting at every gust of wind that threatened to undo his work—we should not easily believe him to be, in reality, the possessor of a large estate. Or if we were to see a house erected in some deep and dismal hollow, where light and air could but scantily reach it, and the winter torrents would be apt to collect around it,—we should not easily believe that the owner,

when he built it, had at his command a pleasant and airy situation, from which he might have had continually a cheerful and extensive prospect.

As difficult it seems to believe, that they who are full of anxieties, and fears, and sorrows, and whose habitual tendency is to dejection and despondency, are in possession of the Christian promises, or know that in those promises they have the title-deeds of a rich and noble inheritance.

It is certainly a very different kind of spirit which we find in some of the first Christians. Their language, in seasons of tribulation, sounds like that of men who had learned to compare the present with the future, and to think every affliction light which must cease with the present. Their conduct shows a consciousness of having laid hold on eternal life. Their very sorrow is more like gladness than the prosperity of many men. Their poverty seems only a temporary disguise of the consciously wealthy. We behold them, in their troubles and distresses, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

I do not recollect that we read of one among them who, when surrounded by circumstances that would commonly be accounted most distressing and appalling, showed the least sign of a wish to forego his secret treasures of faith and hope, for the greatest worldly good that could have been offered to him. Paul, when standing at the judgment seat of rulers

and sovereigns, does not seem ever, in the least, to have envied them their power and splendour, or to have thought their situation comparable to his own. "I would," said he to a king upon his throne, "I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me, were such as I am." And the martyr Stephen seems to have thought nothing of the danger which threatened him from the murderous crowd around him, for the joy and triumph with which he looked up to "the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

Now visions of this kind are, in fact, no more than may be expected to be continually hovering over the sincere believer in the Christian assurances and promises. The protecting presence of God, and the glorious prospect of immortality, are laid open to his mental eye. However troubled and persecuted, however poor in this world, he, too, ought to be "rich in faith" as an heir "of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him."

The apostle James, in our text, introduces this allusion to the real and imperishable wealth of the true Christian, as a means of dissuading men from the neglect and contempt with which they are too apt to treat those who are not rich in this world's goods. He reminds his readers of the very different estimation in which distinctions of this kind seem to have been held by God. He reminds them that, when the great Sovereign of the world was selecting his agents and ministers for the noblest office to

which human beings had ever been raised, he did not take them from the wealthy and mighty, but from the poor and lowly. "Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?"—And, truly, the whole of the Divine proceeding, in the first introduction of Christianity, ought to be a humbling lesson to those who attach much importance to worldly distinctions. Jesus,—whom every mind of any seriousness and reflection must confess to have been the most dignified and majestic of human beings,—whose character, the more it is contemplated, appears the more wonderful and sublime —Jesus, at once the Son of man, and the Son of God, perfect in all human virtues, and reflecting the brightness of the Divine glories;—with how entire an independence on any help of worldly distinction, with how utter an absence of all worldly wealth and splendour, did he make his appearance among men!—A poor cottage, in an obscure town of a despised country—this, while he had at all where to lay his head, was the earthly home of him to whom was destined a name greater than every name! This was the only palace in which his childhood and youth were nurtured, whom God anointed to be a King and High-priest for ever!—And with a like disregard of wealth and rank and station, did Jesus select his Apostles. As if for the express purpose of contrasting with the ideas of greatness that prevail on earth, the estimate of human conditions that

is formed in heaven, he summoned around him the poor of this world, and to them first made the offer of an everlasting inheritance.

But, though this is certainly an important lesson, it does not appear to me more so than the one which we have already in part derived from the same words of the Apostle. It is very desirable that the rich, nay, that all men should esteem and value their fellow-men according to their character, rather than their conditions. But, surely, it is especially desirable that the poor of this world,—that they whose lot is most abundant in hardships and privations,—should not neglect the treasures which are offered to them in the Christian's faith and hope.

It would be to insult the poor, to tell them that the miseries which they have sometimes to endure are not great and grievous. It would shew little sense of the evils to which flesh is heir, to maintain that a fellow-creature, who is suffering from the want of common necessities for himself and family, has not a hard burden to bear. It would be a cruel mockery of cold and hunger and nakedness, to pretend that that there are equal disadvantages of a worldly nature in the condition of the wealthier classes. But it would also be great unkindness to the poor, to conceal from them the extent to which they may both aggravate and alleviate the evils of their lot. While, therefore, we pity them, and do what we can to assist and relieve them, we may be allowed to wish, and earnestly to express the wish,

that they made more use of the resources placed within their reach—that they were more conscious of the capabilities which they have within themselves—that they were more provident for both time and eternity—that they knew more frequently, as many of them, I trust, already know, what it is to be "rich in faith"—that they were found more frequently taking refuge, where many of them, it is to be hoped, have already found sweet refuge, in the consciousness of being "heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him."

I cannot but feel sure that such a consciousness as this, deeply seated in a poor man's heart—such a wealth as this, largely shared by a poor man's family—would make his home, notwithstanding many hardships and privations, the dwelling of far more peace, true comfort, cheerfulness, and even joy, than any abundance of this world's riches could alone bring to its possessor. For whose presence would then be felt in that humble home? Whose providence would be a subject of daily remembrance in prayer and mutual exhortation? and whose promises would be the precious topics of discourse and congratulation?

"We are poor," might the father of such a family say to the sharers of his lot,—"but it is not because God forgetteth or despiseth us. Jesus Christ, the best beloved of God's children, was poor. The apostles of Jesus were poor. God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith. Let us thank God that

He has made us also partakers in these riches. We have not much of this world's good; but let us think of the world which is to come. We shall not be poor there. We labour hard to obtain our daily bread; and sometimes, with all our labour, we can obtain but a scanty portion. But let us bless God that He has given to us in abundance the bread which is from heaven. I have no earthly inheritance to leave behind me, but I can say to my children, "all things are yours," for Christ is yours, and in him is all fulness; God is yours, and in Him is all happiness. The largest estate on earth, if it were mine to bequeath, could be yours only for a little time. But we have an imperishable inheritance. We are heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him."

Thus, and much more effectually than any words can express, might the consciousness of being "rich in faith," sustain the hearts of those who are poor in this world's wealth. Theirs might be the treasure of every good and comfortable word in the Scriptures. Theirs might be the help and consolation of fervent and united prayer. Theirs might be the strength and joy of mutual kindness. Theirs might be the satisfaction of helping one another forward, and seeing one another advance in virtue and piety. Theirs might be the glorious visions of immortality, the confident anticipation of things hoped for, and the deep-felt conviction of things unseen and eternal.

Do not understand me as meaning that these riches

of faith are valuable only or chiefly to the poor of this world. They are of inestimable value to all men, whatever be their station. Without them, the brightest and pleasantest places in which the lines can fall to any man, must gradually become dim and dreary. Not to speak of their superior power, in all seasons, to heighten every pure and rational enjoyment—time, which is every day lessening to the possessor the value of that wealth in which he has, in fact, only a life interest, is, on the contrary, every day making more valuable the riches of faith. Time, which is continually abridging our term in every earthly possession, is only bringing the heirs of the kingdom nearer to the period when they will enter on their inheritance. Their prospect goes on always brightening. It is not old age and infirmity—it is not decay, sickness, and death,—it is immortality—it is heaven—it is their true life and their true home, —to which they have to reckon themselves continually approaching. What is the mere consciousness of being wealthy—what is the thought of having enjoyed all the pleasures which wealth can purchase —compared with the feeling, that by far the best and noblest and happiest part of existence is still to come, and that it assuredly will come? Truly, the wealthiest might think such a feeling cheaply purchased, if they could obtain it by giving in exchange the whole of their wealth. But, in such a case, it would be far easier to find many eager to buy, than one disposed to sell.

And these riches of faith, which are of such value to all that nothing else can be put in comparison with them, have surely nothing connected with their possession to dishearten the poor from being competitors for them. The poor man who is virtuous and devout, labours not, that I am aware, under any disadvantage, from which the poor man without virtue and without piety, is free. I am not aware that the Christian faith will lessen his motives to diligence, sobriety, prudence, and frugality; or that a Christian practice will increase his temptations to a needless and improvident expenditure. I am not aware that, in proportion as he walks humbly before God, and cherishes the hope which teaches him to live soberly, righteously, and piously in this present world, he will be less trusted and respected by his fellow-men, less pleasant and valuable to his family, less comfortable in his home, and less happy in his own heart. I should expect, I confess, quite the opposite effect to this. I should expect the godly poor man to find, that godliness hath promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. I should expect to find more order, peace, contentment, and good management in his dwelling, than in that of the ungodly poor. It appears to me that his earthly interest, as well as his heavenly inheritance, are both on the side of religion. And, therefore, I the more wonder and lament, that they who are poor in this world's good, do not earnestly strive to make themselves "rich in faith," and do not set an exceed-

ing value on the privilege of becoming heirs of the kingdom.

One cause of this, probably, is the want of a sufficiently awakened attention to the real nature of religion. And alas! the aspect under which it is too often exhibited by its professors, and even by the more zealous of its public advocates, is not such as to engage their most favourable attention. They may sometimes be led to think of it chiefly as a subject of dispute and contest, and a source of mutual and bitter hatred.

But even if the professed ministers and missionaries of Christ were more numerous than they are—and if they were all agreed in their representations of religion, as well as of one voice in affirming its close relation to every business and every interest of human beings,—there might still be needed a more extensive and varied agency than theirs, to press home upon the hearts and understandings of the poor in general, the true nature and exceeding value of religion.

And there might be a much more extensive and varied agency for this purpose, if there were a more constant and friendly intercourse between the poor and those who have a larger share of this world's good—if they who are kindly and charitably disposed would not so often be content to be kind and charitable by deputy—if they would more frequently themselves see and converse with those of whose improvement and welfare they are desirous,—and if,

from their own observation of what passes in the dwellings of the poor, they sometimes themselves learned, as feelingly and deeply they might, and sometimes undertook to teach, as by occasional and friendly suggestions they might, how rich they are who are "rich in faith," and what a blessed inheritance, even in this world, is theirs, who are "heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him."

There might be found opportunities for such an intercourse among the different classes of society, in connection with various institutions already existing. Time, too, might be found for using such opportunities, if only they were accounted of sufficient importance to occupy a portion of our hours.

But the great thing needed to make us account them of importance, is to cherish in our own hearts that sense of religion, without which we cannot be expected to care much about its influence over the hearts of others. The great motive which we need to exertion in making other men religious, is the experience, in ourselves and our families, of the peace and hope and joy, the cheerful obedience and submission to God, and the kind affections towards men, which are the fruits of a truly religious spirit. In proportion as we feel ourselves to be "rich in faith,"—in proportion as we can rise superior to earthly troubles and anxieties, in the consciousness of a heavenly inheritance,—in that proportion we must, I think, be earnest in our desires to extend a

participation of the same blessings and consolations to those whom we see destitute of them, and especially to the poor of this world.

God grant that in our own souls the Gospel of Christ may have free course and be glorified!—that in them his glad tidings may be duly valued!—that we may know by our own experience what is meant by being "rich in faith"!—and that then, with a zeal at once enlightened and benevolent, we may invite and persuade our fellow-men to become, with us, "heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him"! AMEN.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE VALUE OF RELIGION IN ADDING TO THE RESOURCES AND ENJOYMENTS OF THE MIND.

AND ELISHA PRAYED, AND SAID, LORD, I PRAY THEE, OPEN HIS EYES THAT HE MAY SEE. AND THE LORD OPENED THE EYES OF THE YOUNG MAN, AND HE SAW; AND BEHOLD, THE MOUNTAIN WAS FULL OF HORSES AND CHARIOTS OF FIRE ROUND ABOUT ELISHA.—II Kings, vi. 17.

WHAT is here described as the effect of a special Divine interference, appears to me very closely to resemble a natural and most delightful consequence from the habitual operation of religious principles. The object of the miraculous vision related in the text was, doubtless, to free the prophet's servant from those fears that had seized upon him, when he beheld the city in which his master had taken refuge, encompassed on every side by a numerous host of enemies. He saw only with the eye of human apprehension, and had nothing left but to join in the despairing cry of his fellow-servants, "Alas, my Master, what shall we do?" The pro-

phet saw with the eye of devout and confiding faith, and therefore answered, "fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." He then prayed, that his servant might be made to behold the security of those whom God protects; and immediately, to his opened eyes, "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." The miraculous vision did, in fact, for him, what the steadfast and habitual belief in the constant presence and kind providence of God may do for us. It banished the fear that man can be more powerful as an enemy, than God as a friend. It opened the mind to a perception of new resources, and the heart to a feeling of new strength and courage.

This is the point of resemblance between the miraculous effect which followed the prophet's prayer, and the natural effect which may be expected from the exercise of religious principles, that I would more particularly endeavour to illustrate. I would fain exhibit to you some of the claims which religion has,—instead of being so unkindly shunned, or so coldly and formally welcomed, as it often is,—to be not merely placed in the highest rank among the contributors to human happiness, but to be served and followed with the warmest zeal. I would speak of the recommendations which it has to our regard, in its power of enlarging the resources and enjoyments of the mind, by creating a sense for things which the natural eye seeth not.

It is an acknowledged use of mental cultivation in general, that it gives a new meaning and interest to the scene of our existence. To the mere bodily sense, there are no other varieties in the aspect of nature than those of form and colour. It is the mind which separates and arranges the ideas of nearness and distance, of height and depth, of beauty and deformity, of cheerfulness and gloom. And in proportion to the richness of the mind's own treasures, are the objects which it contemplates made to appear rich in attractions. We are accustomed to speak of nature as a book. But, like other books, it requires an instructed eye. It is written in a language, which, like other languages, has an alphabet and a vocabulary which must first be learned. We cannot trace any sensibility to what we call the beauty of landscape, or the influence of scenery, in the inferior animals; and but faintly, I believe, if at all, has it ever been discovered in savage man. Living only to devour the prey which he has seized, and to sleep off the fatigue which he has encountered in the pursuit of it, he thinks of the forests for his hunting, the waters for his fishing, the sky for its rain and sunshine, its cold and heat; and here, very naturally, his thought of them stops. His eye is satisfied when he sees the means of supplying his wants. It is man brought up amid the influences of civilisation and instruction, who reads a deeper and more varied meaning in the page which nature opens before him. It is mind, which flings upon the pros-

pect the light of its own thoughts, and the colour of its own imaginations. It is the glass of history, or science, or poetry, through which the various objects and scenes around us are beheld so frequently clothed with beauty and splendour.

The same truth is equally apparent from the very different degrees of interest which will be felt in the same appearances to the natural eye, by individuals who have received, in different portions, the advantages of civilized life. Let them alike be placed where the same landscape is stretched out before them. Let it be one which they would all agree in calling beautiful. Yet the sources of their pleasure in contemplating it may be very different. One may examine, admire, and delight in it, with a painter's eye. In addition to its charms as a picture, another may trace in the slope of the hills, or the aspect of the rocks, some helps to him in his favourite study of the changes that have taken place in the surface of the globe. Another, after dwelling with delighted eye on the general beauty of the prospect, may turn with no less delight to the individual beauties of its trees and plants and flowers. Another may behold in it the scene of some historical or traditionary event, and his imagination may people it again with the forms whose dust has long since mingled with the soil. Another may feel a peculiar pleasure in dwelling on the signs of human industry and comfort; and as his eye rests on some cottage roof, peeping out from the trees that shelter it, he may picture to himself scenes of do-

mestic peacefulness and virtue. To all these it is not so much what is seen by the bodily eye, as the hints which the mind gathers and combines with its own favourite trains of thought, and the character which it thus imparts to external objects, that are the real sources of enjoyment.

The power of the mind to give an interest and meaning beyond that which the natural eye can discover, is still more strikingly apparent, where the scene is not such as would in general be accounted beautiful—where there are none of those objects with which ideas of pleasure or utility are commonly associated. Let there be supposed, for instance, nothing but a wide extent of barren plain—let there be, far as the eye can reach, no sign of human habitation—let there be not a single branch, not a single blade of grass, to bend before the breeze which sweeps over the dreary waste—let there be perfect silence and solitude:—yet, if it be recollected that here once did a band of heroes meet to plan and resolve the deliverance of their country—that here first was the light of freedom kindled in which a whole nation afterwards rejoiced;—or if it be recollected that here the remnant of an oppressed and persecuted people once met for safety—that this remoteness from the dwellings and walks of men was their security—that this wide and uninterrupted expanse of land and sky was their home and their temple—that here they could breathe the air of peace, and worship their God in freedom,—how sub-

lime and sacred does the scene become! how much of glory and of beauty is revealed which the natural eye seeth not!

Nor are such feelings, feelings of which any one is ashamed, or for which he is thought to labour under any disadvantage. On the contrary, it is allowed to be a recommendation of science, of history, of poetry, of every study which ranks among the refinements of civilized life, that they enlarge and multiply the sources of enjoyment to the mind—that they create an additional charm which it can transfuse upon the outward scene of existence. Now what I would plead for religion is, that it offers at least an equal source of this mental enjoyment—that it may, with at least as much advantage, be admitted among the subjects for the exercise of the understanding, the taste, and the imagination—yea, rather I should say, that it brings with it a far richer treasure of interesting and delightful thoughts to mingle with our contemplations of the external world.

What beauty, for instance, or what grandeur,—what reason for admiration and delight, does the man of science discover in any operation of secondary causes, which is not far surpassed when the mind is carried back to a great, original, conscious, and benevolent Cause of all things? What greater interest can be given to the subjects of his inquiries and studies, than by the thought that they are the works of an almighty and still active Hand; or what truth does he read in the varied surface and produc-

tions of the earth, more fitted to throw over the scene a character of importance and pleasantness, than the thought that it is the abode which God prepared for man, and the school in which He is training him for immortality?

Again, do we allow a value to the recollections of the antiquary and historian? Do we feel pleasure in visiting the scenes of great events? Does the thought of such events throw a new and hallowed light over the landscape? Does a glory rest upon the patriot's battle-plain? Does the breath of peace float around the martyr's grave?—And are not the highest and holiest of these feelings such as are inspired by religion?—What is more likely to interest us in the past history of man, than the belief that man is, in his origin and destiny, what religion declares him to be?—Why should we delight so much in the recollections of man as great and good, if we did not believe what religion promises to him in that character?—What should so much consecrate to us the memory of those who have died in the cause of integrity and benevolence, if we did not believe that there is the alliance which religion assures us there is, between this cause and the everlasting, as well as present, interests of man?

Or take the man of imagination,—read the book of nature, with the interpretation of the poet,—look upon the mingled scenery of earth and sky, lighted up with the colourings of his dreams,—revel with him in the creations of his fancy,—follow him in his

wanderings, and listen to the voices of inspiration which he hears. What is the light which his mind can throw over the aspect of nature but the glare of a meteor, if religion mingles not with his thoughts? What glories can he reveal, what things unseen to the natural eye can he make visible, so glorious, so beautiful, as that pervading presence and power of a Father's love, which religion unveils? What meanings can he associate with the things which we see and hear, so important and affecting as those which may be combined with them by a belief in the truths of religion? The village spire, rising from its bower of ancient trees and gilded by the setting sun, may catch his eye and awaken images of rural peace and innocence. But to give those images their perfect beauty, how much must be brought by religion to the picture,—how much must be supposed of the influences which have their source in the house of prayer—of hopes which have been fed, and virtues which have been strengthened, and passions which have been soothed and purified, and sorrows which have been comforted, by the word of God! The distant bells may sound to the ear the note of joy or of mourning, and beautifully may the poet's imagination interpret the tale of their music; but how much of its sweetness must be derived from the whispered truths and promises of religion! It is religion's voice which purifies the thoughts of gladness, and converts the saddest thoughts into a holy and peaceful melancholy.

On grounds such as these—on its rich treasury of ideas and feelings capable of giving a peculiar and exquisite pleasure—might surely be raised a strong recommendation of religion to the most refined and cultivated minds. It opens a new field for the exercise of the taste and the imagination. It brings a large reinforcement to the other powers and resources of the mind. To the knowledge that can be acquired by other means, and to the fairest creations of an earthly fancy, it adds a history, a science, and a poetry of its own. It lights up a new splendour in the brightness of day, and adds new wonders to the tale which night telleth unto night. It reveals a spirit of immortality walking abroad amid the scenes and images of man's decay. It reveals a holy and benevolent presence, encircling every object and beaming on every scene. It writes the name of paternal love on the wide expanse of heaven and the varied surface of earth. It makes the light of this world's sun a shadow only of the wisdom which observeth all, and the strength which supporteth all, and the goodness which blesseth all. It offers, in short, the advantage of an additional sense, like that to which was revealed the vision of the heavenly guards round about the prophet of the Lord,—a sense to which is made manifest the strength in which we stand as servants of the living God,—a sense to which lie open those mysteries and beauties of the scene around us,—"that splendour in the grass and glory in the flower,"—which the natural eye discerneth not.

These, I repeat, might well be recommendations of religion to the most refined and cultivated minds. But what is of far more importance, it offers all these advantages—all these sources of mental enjoyment and comfort—to those whose other means of enriching and exercising their minds have been but few. No need has he to envy the pleasures which the mere learning and genius of this world can give, who has opened his heart to the pure and ennobling influences, who has fitted his mind with the enlightening spirit, of religious truth. He may not be able to read in the book of nature, all that science can read there,—but still he may read there the praises of God. He may not be able to hold much companionship with the spirits of other times, or to catch many rays from the light of past ages. He may know little of what it is to look upon this world with a poet's eye. But still he may walk in the world with God—as seeing Him who is invisible—as believing all things to be filled with His presence—as knowing Him to be the strength and protection and joy of those who put their trust in Him.

This, my friends, this is the knowledge which, above all other kinds, exalteth, purifieth, and gladdeneth the mind. Without it, vain is the wisdom, the wit, the genius, the imagination, of which men may make their boast. Without it, frequent will be the occasions when dissatisfaction, or perplexity, or alarm, will make us ready to cry out with the prophet's servant, "alas! what shall we do?" Without it, life

cannot fail to be often vexation of spirit, and death a gloomy uncertainty. But with it—with the faith, and hope, and knowledge which religion teacheth,—our path is in a light which increaseth more and more unto perfect day—our eyes are opened to behold the hosts of God encamped around us—the present and the future are full of the greatness and glory and love of the Almighty.

I say all this with the understanding that religion will not merely fill the mind, and make servants of the imagination and the feelings, but reduce also the actions and temper under its abiding dominion. I say it of that faith which shows the deep root it has taken, by the loveliness and permanence of its fruits. I say it of that hope which is "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." I say it of that knowledge which buildeth up unto godliness. The true and lasting enjoyments of religion are in proportion to its practical influences. To believe in the presence of God, is to believe in the presence of purity and holiness, and naturally must that belief be most delightful to a pure and holy mind. We see this vividly exemplified in the character of our blessed Lord. If in him the confidence and joy of faith were perfect, it was because in him also the works of faith were perfect. If his heart delighted in the consciousness that his Father was always with him, it was because he also was always intent upon doing his Father's will. If to his mind was revealed all the Father's glory, it was because his pure and spot-

less mind reflected also an image of the Father's perfections.

The inference seems obvious for the conduct to be pursued by his followers. Would they rejoice in the light of religious truth? would they have the eyes of their minds opened to perceive all the glory and all the strength that are around them? Their prayer must be that they may be sanctified by the truth; their endeavour must be to purify their hearts and lives, by the influence of the faith and hope which they profess; their will must be made subservient to the will of God; and then may they expect their confidence and their joy to be complete and permanent, in the presence and protection of God.

DISCOURSE XVI.

JESUS THE BEST TEACHER HOW TO USE THE DIVINE BLESSINGS.

I KNOW HOW TO ABOUND:—Philipp. iv. 12 (part).

THIS is only part of the knowledge in which the Apostle professes to have been instructed. The whole of what he had learned extended to the right use of every situation in which he could be placed. And this great lesson he had learned of Christ. So that his entire assertion amounts, in substance, to the proposition, that there is, in the true spirit of Christianity, a power of advantageously adapting itself to every variety of worldly circumstances. I fully believe that to be the case. But I have selected for our present more particular consideration that part of the Apostle's words in which he asserts his knowledge, as a disciple of Jesus, how to make the proper use of the more pleasing varieties in human conditions: "I know how to abound."

Religion is, perhaps, more frequently considered as a solace of affliction, and an alleviation of calamity,

than as a help and increase to the occasions and materials of joy. It is allowed to be a valuable resource on which to fall back, from disappointment and defeat in our worldly hopes and projects. But it is not so readily remembered as an essential element in the right use and full enjoyment of success. We think of Christ as a teacher of contentment to those who suffer need. We do not so often think of him as a teacher of wisdom and happiness to those who abound. We are willing, perhaps, to accept His help, when the needed lesson is, how to endure privation. But we are not so aware that we might greatly profit by His instructions, in learning how to make the most of the Divine bounties.

Nevertheless, it is a very limited view which is taken of religion, when it is contemplated only as a substitute for pleasures and comforts with which other sources may have failed to supply us. It contains in itself the great requisites for drawing from those sources, when they do not fail, the best kind and largest amount of good. It is not only a lamp for our guidance in dark seasons—a star for our midnight skies;—it is a sun to shed a richer light over the fairest scenes through which we may be travelling. It is not only a kindly breath of heaven to mitigate the wintry storm;—it is summer's genial influence to the flowers and fruits of the garden in which God may have cast our lot. I wish to speak of religion—the spirit to be learned of Christ—in

this its character of a help to the true and full enjoyment of temporal blessings. Taking the Apostle's words in a sense that will comprehend somewhat more than a mere abundance of the things necessary to the bodily support—(an extension of their meaning which is surely warranted by the context), I would engage you with me in considering a few illustrations of the position, that a disciple of Jesus, provided that he has indeed made his own the wisdom to be learned of this heavenly Teacher, knows far better than any mere child of this world how to abound—how to use whatever worldly good may have fallen to his lot.

And first, let us set ourselves to think what will be likely to be his views, dispositions, and conduct, in relation to his means of subsistence. It appears to me that one who has really studied in the same school with the apostle, will not have formed a very large estimate of what he needs, before he can say that he possesses abundance. In the world's school, it seems often a very difficult lesson to know when even a sufficiency begins. We not seldom see men toiling year after year, and that by no means unsuccessfully, yet unprepared to admit that they have already enough. As their means increase, so do their wants. As one point to which they had directed their aims is reached, another, equally if not more desirable, rises into view. And so, perhaps, they will go on through their whole lives, not merely without having learned how to abound, but

without having settled the preliminary question, what is meant by abundance. The simple-minded apostle would, probably, have been very much astonished, if he could have compared his own ideas on the question with those of such persons. He appears to have considered himself as abounding, when his means, however sufficient for his wants, and even for benevolent ministrations to the wants of others, must yet have borne a very insignificant proportion to the accumulations of many, who would be far from accounting themselves wealthy—nay, perhaps, who, measuring their acquisitions by their desires, would still regard themselves as poor.

Now he who has really learned of Jesus, will, most probably, be like-minded with the apostle in this respect; and, in the moderation of his views, will have one great advantage over those, whose anxieties will naturally continue as long as their uncertainty of ever possessing all that they deem necessary to abundance. It is one important lesson to know, with how little a man may truly say that he has enough—with how little he may really possess a command over the most valuable sources of earthly enjoyment—with how little help from outward circumstances, he may have the feeling of even abounding in the means of making his existence a blessing to himself and his fellow-men. And this lesson I know not who is likely to learn, if not the earnest and humble disciple of Christ.

But this, after all, is only a preliminary lesson to

that of knowing how to abound. We will suppose the point settled, that the worldly condition is one of abundance; that it is felt to be so; and that there is no craving for more. Yet of very different kinds may still be the dispositions and purposes with which this satisfied feeling is accompanied. In one man the uppermost thought may be that he will thenceforth take his ease, enjoy his leisure, and surround himself with comforts. Is it he who knows how to abound? Let his ideas of pleasure be gross or refined—let his plans for the pursuit of it be contracted or enlarged,—so long as they are merely varied forms of selfishness, does he really know how to make the best use of his abundance?—Or again, in another, the thought in immediate connection with the same satisfied feeling, may go beyond himself to the acquaintances, the friends, the family, with whom he will now live in more frequent and pleasant intercourse. His plans may not have a direct or exclusive reference to himself. They may be largely influenced by his kindly feelings for others. Still, while they are only so influenced—while there is on them no impress of a nobler and more generous spirit than one which, however amiable, is indirectly selfish—does he thoroughly know how to abound? Is there no better way to be learned of using the means which he possesses?

What, then, is the lesson, in this respect, which the disciple of Jesus will have learned? One thing in which he will certainly have been instructed, is the

use which he must make of his abundance. He must not use it to procure himself a single hurtful indulgence. However ample his means, he knows that they were not given to be employed in undermining his health, or weakening his moral and religious principles. They were not given that he might thereby become less mindful of the Giver, or less careful to live a godly, righteous, and sober life. They were not given that he might thereby be lifted up with pride above his fellow-men, or that he might be so filled with the love of this world as to become indifferent about the concerns of another. This may indeed be said to be a negative lesson; inasmuch as it teaches only how not to use the worldly means, however abundant. Nevertheless, it is an immense advantage to have thoroughly learned this lesson; and great would be the amount of misery saved, if all who abound could be brought even to this degree of Christian knowledge and practice. Let us go on, however, to the more positive instruction in which a disciple of Jesus will be likely to be also grounded, with respect to his employment of his worldly substance. He will have learned, I should think, to consider it as received from the hand of a bountiful God, and, therefore, to be so used that a thankful remembrance of God may suitably and naturally accompany the use. That enjoyment of worldly good can hardly be other than allowable in its kind, and properly moderate in its degree, which is not lessened by the thought of the Divine presence, but

easily and pleasantly admits the exercise of devotional feelings. That gladness of heart in the participation of the Divine bounties can hardly fail to be pure and innocent, which is always in close alliance with a disposition to praise and bless and love their gracious Giver. And such is likely to be the alliance between enjoyment and religious gratitude, in the mind which has thoroughly learned of Jesus. But the disciple of Jesus will farther have learned to consider the bounties of Providence as a trust and a stewardship, in the management of which he is to keep in view the honour of God, and the service of his fellow-men. And in proportion to the moderation of his desires for himself, will he have the more to spare from his abundance for the purposes of piety and benevolence. In proportion, too, as these purposes are dear to him, will be his delight in faithfully using his means and opportunities of promoting them. He will be a cheerful giver, because he will have learned of his heavenly teacher to think it "more blessed to give, than to receive." At the same time, he will neither seek, in what he does, the notice and praise of men, nor claim any merit in the sight of God. For he will have learned to feel that to do good, however secretly, is itself an honour and a joy, which needs no addition from the commendations of men; and that to be entrusted with the power of doing good is rather an increase of his own debt to the Divine bounty, than a means of bringing that bounty under obligations to himself.

He will have learned that all which we have is from God, and that only from what is already and properly His own can we give back to Him. But while he will be thus humble, he will not be less thankful and rejoicing, as an instrument in the hand of God for communicating blessings to men.

He, then, who besides being moderate in his estimate of the requisites for worldly comfort, and besides being thoroughly resolved against any use of whatever may be his abundance that would be hurtful to either body or soul, has learned also to carry with him a thankful and devout spirit into the simple, pure, and rational enjoyments which he allows himself—who has learned, moreover, to account it an honour and a joy to be made a steward of the Divine bounties, and thankfully to give the glory to God, rather than to seek praise, or demand reward, for all that he can do in the administration of his stewardship,—does not such a one know how to abound? Or will you say that there is any among the children of this world, who is wiser in his use of his worldly means than such a disciple of Jesus?

But there may be an abundance besides that of worldly means. He may be said to abound, and that in an important sense, who is in a season of life when the bodily health, the animal spirits, the mental vigour, the earthly hopes and prospects, are all in their most favourable state. There is no amount of mere wealth which can make existence such a felt blessing as it often is in the early sum-

mer of the human year. There is no price in the power of mere wealth to give, which can bring back the bright and glowing colours then often flung over the present and the future. Days and weeks and months are then, to fancy's eye, shedding their successive light on the long-drawn vista, and many voices of promise are eloquent in the heart. Yes; that, too, is a time of abundance—of abundant opportunities—of abundant responsibilities. And who best knows how to use such a time? who best knows how to derive advantage from the freshness of all his powers—from his freedom to choose, among the various paths and purposes of existence, in which direction, and on what objects to exert them? Is it not he who has learned of Jesus the true worth of life—the true dignity of man—the high and holy calling wherewith we are called of God unto glory, honour, and immortality—the imperishable inheritance prepared for virtue and piety? Will not he who knows what capacities he has in himself of improvement and happiness, know also how to value and to use his opportunities of cultivating them? Will not he, at the time when such opportunities are most abundant, be likely to be most careful and diligent in seizing them?

But in any season of life, he may be said, in an important sense, to abound, who possesses large means of intellectual and moral culture. Means, indeed, of this kind, we all have in a degree, which, if we did but make the most of them, would doubt-

less be found sufficient for much advancement, and for much happiness. The question, however, now is, where such means abound, who will be likely to derive the greatest advantage and enjoyment from them? And again, I think, the answer will be, that it will be he who feels most deeply the sacredness of the trust which in them is committed to him by the Divine goodness, and who values most highly that spiritual and immortal nature within him, for the advancement of which he believes them to have been bestowed—that is, it will be he who has contemplated the capabilities and the destination of man with the faith and hope learned of Jesus. He will know how to use, for he will have learned to use thankfully, devoutly, and benevolently, whatever abundance of mental wealth and moral power he may be permitted to acquire.

There is still another sense in which a man may be said to abound. It is when he is largely blessed in his social and domestic affections—when he has friends and relatives through whom he may be continually experiencing the pleasure of exercising and receiving kindness. Few, indeed, are there who, in this respect, are wholly destitute — who have not some friendly circle within which they can make themselves welcome, and in which they can take refuge, whenever they need sympathy and encouragement. And many, it is pleasant to believe, are the homes which, however moderate may be their position in other respects, of worldly good, are yet rich in

this wealth of the heart. Yes; many are the homes, even of what the world would call poverty, in which there is a pervading spirit of mutual kindness, delightful to contemplate; how much more delightful to those who are living under its benignant power! But the question is, where opportunities for the interchange of such kindness abound, who will best know how to use them:—who will best know how to derive benefit and enjoyment, for himself and for others, from the friends and relatives with whom he is connected? Again, it seems to me that it will be he who carries into all his intercourse with them the gentle, forbearing, considerate, and benevolent spirit, which may certainly be learned of Jesus—who best remembers, in all his dealings with them, the instructions and example of that teacher—and who, with the far-looking wisdom of the Christian hope, keeps in view the immortal fruits which may grow out of the pure and virtuous affections cherished during the continuance of this transient scene.

The sum of what I have intended to say, and the impression which I wish to leave on your minds is, that he best knows how to use all the blessings of this present life, who is prepared to make the most truly religious—that is, the most thankful, devout, virtuous, and benevolent use of them—who is prepared to enter upon his enjoyment of them, with a pure and hearty love to God and man. To him who has thoroughly learned of Jesus, it seems to me, that all the bounties of Providence must have an increased

value, all the duties and engagements of life an additional importance, and all the relations of human beings to one another an additional sanctity. To those of you, then, who abound in your worldly means—(and how few of you are there whom the Apostle would not have considered as abounding)—I would say,—learn of Jesus, that you may know how to abound—how to make what you have a blessing to yourselves and your fellow-men. To those of you who are in that season of life when there is most promise of health and strength, most freshness and liveliness of every feeling, and every faculty, I would say,—learn of Jesus, that you may know how most wisely and happily to employ this time of conscious energy and abundant opportunity. To those of you, in any season of life, who have tastes for intellectual enjoyment, and perceptions for moral beauty, I would say,—learn of Jesus, that you may know how most steadily and successfully to pursue the business of intellectual and moral cultivation—how to secure its richest and most wholesome fruits, as well as to gather its richest and sweetest flowers. And to those of you who are blessed with friends and relatives, who are bound to your fellow-beings by many dear and hallowed ties, I would say,—learn of Jesus, that you may know how to bring down upon your earthly friendships, and into your earthly homes, that light of holiness and peace and joy, which will go on shining more and more unto the perfect, unclouded, and unending day of heaven.

DISCOURSE XVII.

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS.

THEREFORE I TAKE PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES, IN REPROACHES, IN NECESSITIES, IN PERSECUTIONS, IN DISTRESSES, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE: FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG.—II Cor. xii. 10.

"WHEN I am weak, then am I strong." These words sound very much like a contradiction. Nevertheless, it appears, from what we can learn of the Apostle's history, that they express no more than was strictly and gloriously true. Circumstances which, naturally, might have been thought likely to hinder, or at least, very much lessen his success, as a minister of the Gospel, eventually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel. Infirmities which, beforehand, would have been pronounced disqualifications for his office, became signal evidences of the power from above which rested on him.

Some great bodily weakness or disease—we are not told what—had seemed to himself, at one time, so likely to interfere with the efficient discharge of his apostolic duties, that he had earnestly and re-

peatedly desired to have it removed. But his request had been answered by an assurance, that the strength of the Master would only be the more strikingly displayed through this weakness of the servant. Thenceforth he had, he says, been inclined rather to glory and take pleasure, in the very things which formerly would have excited his apprehensions. For he had now learned to consider them as means of more fully proving "the power of Christ" which rested on him.

There certainly was a peculiar sense in which the Apostle could use this language, as we must perceive at once, on thus considering it in connection with the whole passage in which it is found. But this is not the only sense in which he might have used the same words. Nor is it necessary to be an apostle, in order to be qualified to use them in a very important sense. It is the glory of real, vital Christianity, to furnish many occasions in the experience of its humble and hearty professor, on which he can say, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

My present purpose and wish is to bring some of these occasions before your attention.

In the first place, the words used by the Apostle may be very fitly applied, to denote the close and natural connection which there is between a real consciousness of weakness, and a disposition to lay hold on every offered help and support.

It may almost be laid down as a moral axiom, that the most truly secure are they who are the least in-

clined to think themselves so. "To this man, I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." They who "trust in themselves that they are righteous," and who are confident in their own power to resist the temptations which may assail them, are not likely to remember the admonition to "look well to their goings." They are not likely to remember the necessity of "walking circumspectly," or the wisdom of watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication. It is not wonderful, therefore, if they are often taken unawares—surprised, by some sudden assault of temptation, into transgressions of which, perhaps, if suggested to them beforehand, they would have believed themselves incapable. We are reminded of this in the instance of Hazael. And we have another standing admonition of a like kind in the history and character of Peter. We know how confident he was of his courage and constancy, and we know also how completely, on more than one occasion, he might have reversed the words of the text, and have said, "when I am strong, then am I weak."

On the contrary, he who begins tremblingly, is likely to go on warily, and therefore safely. He who has not too high notions, either of human nature generally, or of his own spiritual attainments and powers in particular—he who has considered well the humbling proofs of wretched and guilty weakness, often exhibited in the history of human beings,

and remembers that he himself is also human, liable, no less than the rest of his race, to infirmity, folly, and sin,—he who thinks of the work which he has to do as a great and difficult work, and of the hindrances and temptations that he may expect as numerous and powerful,—he whom thoughts and recollections of this kind make not a little doubtful of his own sufficiency for the duties required of him, —is not likely to forget the wariness and watchfulness with which he must proceed, or the earnestness and constancy with which it behoves him to seek help where help is promised, and counsel where counsel is offered. He is not likely to despise or neglect any appointed means of grace. His sense of weakness will make him cling the more closely to the hand which can give him strength. His apprehensions of difficulty and danger will compel him to take refuge in the protection, on which alone he believes he can depend.

A true sense of the awful depth to which human nature may fall, and a lively feeling that this very nature is our own, cannot but be powerful persuasives to humility; and with humility the whole Christian course must be begun, continued, and ended. "God be merciful to me a sinner," is the first prayer of an awakened heart; and "by the grace of God I am what I am," is the lowly and devout confession of the most advanced and persevering follower after holiness.

A true sense of weakness will also keep alive a

spirit of self-distrust and self-jealousy; and these feelings cannot exist without continually urging us to watchfulness and prayer. In short, all those exercises of the mind which have the recommendation of bringing it within the reach of holy and heavenly influences—such as religious meditation, the reading of the Scriptures, communing with those who also fear the Lord, the praises and prayers of the worshipping assembly, together with those of the family and the closet, and whatever else can be considered a help to godliness,—will be eagerly used by him who truly feels the weakness of his nature. And thus we may perceive a sense in which, though he may not say it of himself, it may properly be said of him, that "when he is weak, then is he strong." He is strong in that lowliness of mind which he has learned from a knowledge of his weakness, and which will not let him forget, or cease to implore, the help which he needs. He will not trust himself to unaided conflict with the enemies of his soul. He will not presumptuously venture himself within the reach of their snares, or their sudden assaults. He has fled for refuge to the sanctuary, and he will abide there. He has laid hold on the altar of God, and wisely does he fear, even for a moment, to let go his hold.

But, in the second place, the words of our text may also be applied to express the great power of religion to raise a man above any circumstances of his earthly lot that might, otherwise, be humiliating

and disheartening. He is poor, for instance. His employment is one which the world, in its unthinking pride, calls mean, though, at the same time, the proudest cannot deny it to be useful and honest. His utmost diligence can do no more than furnish him with a scanty subsistence, if even it can always do that. He is not likely to be known beyond a very small circle of his fellow-beings; and those, for the most part, as poor and obscure as himself. Well; the world will see no sign of greatness in such a lot. It will not rank such a man among its rich and mighty ones:—yet, perhaps, there is a respect in which the wealthiest is poorer, and the mightiest weaker, than he. The wealthiest may feel that death will rob him of his all. But this man may be confident in hope that death will make him everlastingly rich. Nay; he may even now be rich in the noblest and most enduring treasures. The mightiest may feel that, save in this world, his soul has no settled stay. But this man may be able to tell himself, that God is the strength of his soul, and his portion for ever. Yea; and he may owe this great privilege, in part, to the very circumstances of his lot which appear to the world the most unfavourable. It may have been his poverty, that made him at first the more inclined to receive the gospel which was preached to the poor. It may have been the uninviting aspect of his earthly lot, that made him glad to keep his attention directed to "another country, even a heavenly." When, in

the fulness of his religious joy, he looks back upon the scenes through which he has passed, he may, perhaps, see reason to bless God that they were not more abundant in earthly pleasantness;—he may think that, if they had been, he might not now have had so clear and glorious a light on his future prospects;—he might not have felt so deeply and revivingly in his soul the power of the world to come;—he may say, it is my life of hardship and privation which has made me know so much of God's word, value so much the thought of His presence, meditate so much upon His promises, desire so much His favour;—it is my toilsome and often painful experience on earth, that has made me so much delight to have my conversation in heaven;—"when I am weak, then am I strong." When I most feel my poverty, with respect to the possessions of this world, my unnoticed, unfriended condition with respect to any expectations from men,—then do I most warmly glow with a thankful consciousness of my unspeakable and exhaustless riches in God and Christ.

It is obvious that this application of the Apostle's words classes them with those other passages in which, with the same appearance of paradox, but reality of sublime and glorious meaning, the believer is represented as, though poor, yet rich, as "having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

In the next place, the same words may be applied to express the power of religion to sustain and

strengthen the soul amidst the infirmities and decays of the body. There is a chilling and gloomy philosophy, at least so I feel it, which would have us believe that the body is, in fact, the whole human being; and that what we call the mind is merely an attribute or quality of the body, and doomed together with it to perish. Nor can it be denied that there are sometimes appearances, which we know not altogether how to explain, of mental as well as bodily decay. But beautifully and gloriously contrasted with such appearances, and well fitted to counteract their disheartening influence, are the instances in which sickness, pain, infirmity, old age, are all seen in vain gathering themselves together against the strength, composure, and dignity of the soul. While the outward man is feeble and perishing, the inward man is renewed day by day. While the body is continually becoming less and less capable of exertion,—while the limbs gradually refuse their respective offices, and each sense is growing more dull and tardy in its conveyance of intelligence from the world without;—the soul maintains its communion with God, its faith in Christ, its hope in Heaven;—the soul is capable of peace, of joy, of triumph; amidst surrounding darkness it has a steady sunshine within,—and though the lips may not be able to utter the words, yet every sign of the feelings which possess the departing spirit, is in unison with the assertion, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

The same words may farther be applied, to express the power of religion to sustain and cheer the soul under the sorrows to which it may, for a time, be left in this world of change, separation, and death. Grief is often the teacher of wise and valuable lessons. The house of mourning is often the dwelling-place of serious and virtuous purposes. When the heart is mournfully asking, "who will shew me any good?" then seems, peculiarly, a time for its hearing and obeying the voice which says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." The experience of the uncertainty connected with earthly friendships, enhances the blessedness of having a friend who cannot change or die. The pain of separation endears the hope of re-union. The need of comfort awakens the recollections that a Comforter is promised, and will be found for those who seek Him. Thus from human weakness begin the motives which urge on to Christian strength. Yea, thus, even by means of nature's weakness, is displayed the power of faith;—when sorrow is seen to be mingled with hope, and tribulation to be working patience, and patience to be going on to its perfect work of a serene and cheerful holiness.

Lastly, I would remind you that the words of our text may be applied to express, generally, the Christian's sense of refuge in the revealed mind and will of God,—his sense of the relief that he can thus find from all the difficulties and perplexities in which, if left to his reason alone, he might be involved.

"When I am weak," he may say, in my attempt to explain some mystery of Providence, "then am I strong" in the joy of my belief that God doeth nothing in vain. "When I am weak" in my endeavour to fathom some depth of the Divine counsels, "then am I strong" in my recollection of the assurance, that "God will cause all things to work together for good to them that love Him." "When I am weak" in my speculations and reasonings on the question, how sinners may hope for pardon, or how their sins can be blotted out, "then am I strong" in remembering the declaration "that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And "when I am weak" in the attempt, by reason's help, to lift up the veil which hangs over the state of the dead, and to obtain from nature a clear answer to the inquiry, "when a man dieth, shall he live again"? —"then am I strong" in the confidence inspired by the words of my beloved Lord, "I am the resurrection and the life."

The practical lesson which naturally presents itself as arising out of such reflections is, that we should give all diligence to store our minds with the great principles and promises of Christian faith. These are the true nourishment of the soul. These are the abundant sources of strength for our weakness. And to these access may continue open long after all others have seemed closed against us. Evils of various kinds may gather around the Christian;—in-

firmities, numerous and weighty, may press upon him. Yet the power of Christ may still be displayed in him,—in his patience, serenity, and humble hope. The capacities and energies of his mind may seem enfeebled and encumbered by the ruins of its earthly tenement;—philosophy may reason, and eloquence may plead in vain;—yet the voice of Christ may still be heard and recognised by his soul, not speaking in any laboured words of man's wisdom, not straining the understanding, nor fatiguing the attention, but simply, and at the same time, authoritatively proclaiming, "I know my sheep, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand": —"My grace is sufficient for thee."

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE.

BEHOLD, I SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY A BLESSING AND A CURSE. —Deut. vi. 26.

THESE words were addressed to the Israelites in relation to the respective consequences of their obedience or disobedience, as a nation, to the commandments of God. And most remarkably have the predicted consequences been realised in their national history.

But the same words may very fitly be used, in relation to the consequences connected with the manner in which men receive and employ the gifts of their Creator. Every thing seems left by Him dependent on the choice and power of man to make it a good or an evil. The voice of His Providence, as it may be heard in the facts of man's continual experience, still repeats, in connection with every thing that may be wisely or unwisely, well or ill employed, the same impressive warning, "Behold, I set before you a blessing and a curse."

Let us, in order to deepen its impression, give our attention to a few illustrations of the manner in which the gifts of God, even the greatest and most valuable of them, may be made the occasions of evil and misery to man.

In the first place, there is life itself. We speak of this as the gift of God; and we rightly so speak. We received it by His appointment. We depend upon His power and His providence for every moment of its continuance. It is a gift, too, upon which, for the most part, we set a high value. Even in old age men are found, in general, to cling to it very closely. We shrink from the thought of losing it. We would sacrifice much in order to preserve it. "Yea, every thing which a man has will he give for his life."

Yet with respect to this gift, how much there is to make applicable such a warning as that of the text! How many there are whose existence may truly be said to be a curse to themselves and their fellow-men! How many whose miserable abuse of it inclines us to think that it would have been good for themselves, and the world which they have lived to disturb and corrupt, if they had never been born!

But life is a comprehensive word. It implies the possession of many things, rather than one single gift. Our reflections upon the manner in which it may be used, may, therefore, be distributed under the several particulars usually considered as adding to its value.

One of the greatest requisites for its enjoyment is

health—a sound and serviceable state of the bodily frame, such as enables it with ease and activity to execute the purposes of the mind. This we call, and often most justly, an invaluable blessing. With this in our possession, we can go cheerfully and pleasantly to our various employments. To move and act is itself a pleasure. The mind, too, shares in the vigour and liveliness of the body. Every thing around us looks more brightly and cheerily when we feel ourselves in good health. We make less of our difficulties. Often we even like the excitement of contending with them. And, on the other hand, this single gift of our Creator withdrawn, what a change takes place! what a toil and a burthen does exertion become! Often, too, with the body the mind droops and languishes! It is a pain to think. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

And yet this gift of health—so necessary to the enjoyment of life itself—so ardently desired by those who have it not—is it always a blessing to those who have it in their possession? Alas! not seldom do they convert it into a curse. They find in it an excuse for thoughtlessness and folly. They are hurried by it into an intemperate and injurious chase of pleasure. They are tempted by it to delay the execution of wise and good resolves. They come at last, perhaps, to lament the want of that early seriousness and sobriety, which the absence or suspension of this gift might, they think, have taught them. That is, they are made themselves to feel the possibility, that

pain and sickness might have been greater blessings than health has been found to them.

But such an experience brings with it no ground for a charge against their Creator. He is not answerable for their abuse of his kindness. They ought to have known that whatever He gives to man, He gives as to a creature whom He has also endowed with reason and judgment. They ought to have received his gift with more recollection of the warning, that in it was set before them a blessing and a curse.

The productions of the earth are necessary to the support of life. And these are the gifts of the Creator. He causeth summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, to succeed one another. He giveth the sunshine and the rain. He giveth to the soil its capability of production. He provideth the seeds and plants which are suited to its varieties of quality and situation. Man creates nothing. All that he can do is to work with materials furnished to his hands. His utmost industry and skill can do nothing, where God has not begun and done much before him. And bountifully has God provided for him.

Yet in this bounty is there only blessing to be found? On the contrary, we read of nations who appear to owe their idleness, their ignorance, their depravity, to the very abundance of nature with which they are surrounded—to the mildness of their climate and the luxuriance of their soil—to the ease

with which their wants are supplied, and their love of pleasure gratified.

And why speak of what we read, when we must know, from our own observation, that man is continually converting into a curse the bounties of Providence intended for his support and comfort—making the food which should minister to his health and strength, minister instead, by his gluttonous excess, to disease and infirmity—extracting from what should be a pleasant refreshment, a deadly poison by his intemperance—and finding, in the means supplied to him of providing himself with shelter and clothing, the materials of gratification to his pride and vanity.

Is all this to be laid to the charge of his Creator? May we say that His gifts were intended for evil?—Oh! surely not. The fault is in man for not perceiving that, as a rational being, he is called on to exercise the power of choice, discrimination, and self-control, which have also been given to him. The fault is in him, and not in his Maker, if he does not give heed to the warning of the blessing and the curse, which are both set before him.

A large command over the bounties of Providence is usually thought a great help to the enjoyment of life. In fact, it might be supposed, from men's eagerness in the pursuit of them, that riches meant exactly the same thing as happiness. How few have been known to refuse them when offered! How few seem to have the idea of danger or re-

sponsibility in accepting them! They think rather of the power with which they shall thus be invested—perhaps the power for good to their fellow-creatures—at least the power for their own enjoyment.

Yet, surely, the power for evil thus entrusted to a human being is fearfully great. True, the rich man may live as a steward and representative of the Divine Benefactor. He may cause blessings to abound among his fellow-beings. His secret bounty may be continually and largely flowing. He may delight to consider himself an instrument in the hand of Providence for doing good; and while he gladdens the hearts around him, may modestly shrink from their thanks and praises, with the feeling of being no more than the cloud from which God sends down the shower. But, if riches can be made a blessing, how often have they also been made a curse! How often have they corrupted and enslaved the heart, pampered the appetites, relaxed the sinews of virtuous purposes, deadened the religious sensibilities and affections, and ministered rather to pride, insolence, rivalry, resentment, and oppression, than to compassion and mercy!

Yet, are we thence to infer that they have been bestowed by God in enmity to man?—no; it is man who has been his own enemy by not accepting them as a trust—by not remembering the responsibility which attaches to every gift of God—by not heed-

ing the voice of warning in connection with the gift: "Behold, I set before you a blessing and a curse."

The faculties and endowments of the mind are allowed to be of still greater value than the amplest means of providing for the comfort and gratification of the body. Mental wealth and mental power are acknowledged to be higher objects of ambition than the mere accumulation of money, and what money can buy. Yet, neither are the riches of the mind without their danger and their snare. True, it is glorious to have the power of being a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness. It is an honourable and blessed employment to accumulate knowledge, in order to diffuse it again among the ignorant—to spend time and labour in pursuit of truth, in order to direct upon it, when discovered, the attention and love of our fellow-men. It is a lawful and valuable dominion over the minds of others, which is obtained by convincing and persuading them in relation to their duties and true interests—by gaining them over to the side of virtue, benevolence, and piety. But are these the purposes to which great powers and attainments of mind are always devoted? Alas! how often, on the contrary, have they been employed for selfish and wicked ends—to deceive, and blind, and mislead—to make vice look like virtue—to insinuate doubt and mistrust, where it is most of all important that men should believe and hope! How formidable is knowledge in alliance with malignity! How mis-

chievous is eloquence when pleading the cause of corrupt and wicked passions!—And even when not perverted to malevolent purposes, it is possible for the riches of the mind to become a snare and a temptation. They may come to be considered as an end, and not a means. They may be sought and valued merely for the selfish pleasure of possessing and contemplating them. The mind may at length live in them and for them, shut up with its own treasures, without a thought or care for the world around or for the world to come. Even knowledge and the love of knowledge may thus, with respect to the great and valuable purposes of existence, become as a mill-stone tied about the neck, to sink a man into indolence, and indifference, and uselessness.

But is it the fault of Him who breathed into man the spirit of understanding, and gave him his wonderful and noble capacities—when they are thus fatally abused?—no; rather it is man who is to be blamed for not remembering, in connection with even these gifts of his Creator, that there may be found in them both a blessing and a curse.

Exceedingly important are the relations which subsist among the members of the great social family, and the influence which man may have on the comfort and happiness of his fellow-man. When we look at a map of the world, we see that means are provided for communication and intercourse between the inhabitants of the most distant coun-

tries. We see rivers traversing extensive continents in all directions. We see the oceans into which they flow, extending their waters to the remotest shores. When we examine the accounts of travellers, we find that each country, besides producing what its own inhabitants want, is rich in superfluities, that may be made useful in other countries. What should we expect to be the natural effect of this provision? Does it not seem expressly made for the purpose of a friendly interchange of benefits among all nations? Should we not expect also that, in the train of commerce,—civilization, humanity, just laws, good government, knowledge, freedom, virtue, religion, would gradually extend themselves over the whole face of the earth?

Yet, has this always been the effect of these facilities of intercourse? Alas! how often, on the contrary, has nation been a curse to nation! How often has the character of man to his fellow-man been that of a jealous rival, a savage enemy, a remorseless plunderer, a merciless oppressor! That ocean which should have wafted the means of instruction and improvement from an enlightened country to the ends of the earth, has too often borne its navies to enslave and destroy. Those rivers which open a way to the interior of extensive continents, have too often conveyed to the simple and untaught dwellers in the wilderness, not instructors and benefactors, but invaders, robbers, and murderers.

But here again the fault has not been in the bountiful providence of God, but in the slowness of man to perceive, in connection with every power which gives him superiority over his fellow-man, the fact of its liability to be made a curse as well as a blessing.

The closer relations which subsist among men, as neighbours, friends, and kindred, have a great share in the comfort or discomfort, the happiness or misery of life. The society of his fellow-beings is one great source to which a man naturally looks for enjoyment. And great certainly may be the enjoyment derived from this source. It is pleasant to believe that our welfare is a subject of affectionate interest to others. It is pleasant to see their looks and hear their words of kindness. It is more than pleasant to know that we may rely on their help, their counsel, their sympathy, whenever we need it. And this should be the meaning of friendship, of kindred, of brotherhood. Men were, doubtless, placed in these relations to one another, that they might be mutual helpers and encouragers in every thing tending to peace, virtue, and happiness.

But is this the uniform result? Alas, how many have been led only into evil by their chosen associates! how many have been deceived and betrayed by those whom they trusted! how often have a man's foes been those of his own kin and his own house! how often have children been corrupted and ruined by the example of parents! and how often

have the hearts of parents been broken by the ingratitude and misconduct of children! Perhaps, indeed, it is when a man, and especially a young man, is considering whom he should choose for his companions and friends, and when parents are thinking on their natural hopes and wishes for their children, that there is most need of remembering that even here, too, are set before us a blessing and a curse.

Liberty—personal, civil, and religious—is a valuable possession. It is claimed as the birth-right of human beings. It is the boast of those who have it. And many have been found, who thought the sacrifice of their lives not too great a price to secure it for their descendants. Yet with much that is truly valuable, noble, and worthy of man's utmost desires and exertions to acquire and preserve it—what does it also convey to its possessor?—to an individual, the power of being foolish, troublesome, and mischievous—to a nation, the power of committing mistakes which may entail calamities, and difficulties, and burthens, on many successive generations. It is a possession likely to be beneficial only in proportion to the wisdom and virtue, the knowledge, integrity, and benevolence, of those to whom it is entrusted. It is not exempt from the possibility of being a curse as well as a blessing.

The case is the same with the most sacred and immediate gifts of God—with the institutions of religion which He has sanctioned—with the truths of religion which He has revealed.

It is an institution of religion, that man shall not labour without intermission and without relief—that on one day out of seven he shall rest from his toils, and refresh the powers of both his body and his mind. And pleasant it is to think how many thousands, yea millions, throughout the Christian world, are, on every sabbath, resting from their worldly labours, forgetting their worldly cares, and in their devout meditations and exercises finding peace and comfort to their souls. Pleasant it is, in the streets of a large town, to see multitudes going, in different directions, to their respective houses of prayer. Pleasant it is, when we are ourselves engaging in worship, to think that we are joining with thousands, and tens of thousands, in offering up praise and supplication to Him who looketh upon all hearts alike, and notwithstanding their different forms of words, and, it may be, their different creeds, beholdeth, accepteth, and blesseth every where those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

But not to all, confessedly, is the day thus blessed. It is a day which, for many, would seem much better struck out from the days of the week. It is a day, the leisure of which they devote to more than their usual intemperance and wickedness. It is a day, to their misuse of which may be traced the corruption and ruin, the destruction in character and estate, in body and soul, of multitudes. It is a day, which has made them, perhaps, "ten-fold more" than they otherwise might have been, "the children of hell."

I have spoken of the pleasure which there is in thinking of those who, on such days, meet together in their respective houses of prayer. But, alas! how largely are our churches and chapels outnumbered by places of resort for very different purposes! And how painful it is to think of those who, at this very hour, are mustering in the enticing haunts of intemperance and revelry!

Yet is the appointment of the day itself, on that account, to be blamed? Shall all be condemned to uninterrupted labour, because some, nay many, know not how to use their intervals of rest?—One thing only is needed—that even with this appointment should be connected a remembrance of the warning, that in it are set before us a blessing and a curse.

Nor is a like warning inapplicable or unnecessary, in reference to our manner of receiving and using the most important truths of religion.—"Glory to God on high, good will to men, and peace on earth"—is the heavenly proclamation of the effects to be produced by religion. A power to enlighten the conscience, to purify the heart, to animate and strengthen the love of goodness, to infuse into men a spirit of kindness and hope, to comfort their sorrows and dispel their fears—this is the blessed and glorious power given to religion. And many, in every age and every clime to which the Gospel has reached, have been the souls that have felt this power.—But, oh! what dissensions, what persecutions, what wars,

what hatred, malice, and uncharitableness, have also, apparently, been occasioned by religion, yea, have seemed to grow out of a zeal for God and His Christ!—Alas, where has been the glory to God, or the good-will to men, in the angry denunciations which men have uttered against each other in the name of God? Where has been the promised peace on earth, in the oppositions and enmities for which men have pleaded the authority of heaven? And where has been the mild and loving spirit of Jesus, in the bitter words and even savage deeds of many, who have made his cross the ensign of their contests? —Add to these considerations, the fearful responsibility which confessedly must accompany the possession of a revelation from God. It must be an aggravation of sin, when it is committed against the clearest knowledge and strongest conviction. And, accordingly, we are told that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Again, we are warned that the same doctrines which are to some "the savour of life unto life," are to others "the savour of death unto death." It cannot, therefore, be unnecessary—it must, rather, be highly important, that even when we think of religion as the gift of God, we should think of it in connection with a warning that, according to our use of this gift also, it will prove a blessing or a curse.

If these reflections produce in our minds the effects for which they seem to me adapted, we shall see no cause in any thing that has been said, to arraign the

appointments of Providence, or to complain because the same things which, if rightly used, are good, are capable also of being so abused as to become, or rather to occasion, evil. We shall see only the natural and unavoidable consequence of the part assigned to man, as a rational and accountable creature. As such a creature he must be left to discriminate, to judge, to choose, among the different ways that are open before him. Every step that he takes, all that he does, and all that he is, must be accompanied with the consciousness of his own consent in the matter. God has done all that can be required, in plainly warning him that a blessing and a curse, that life and death attend upon his choice—in plainly teaching him what things he ought to choose, and what to avoid—and in freely offering His own help in the pursuit of every thing that is truly good and desirable.

And while we come to this conclusion, we shall feel also, I trust, the obligation that is upon us, to take care how we choose for ourselves—how we employ the gifts of a bountiful and fatherly Providence—how we use the talents committed to our keeping and care. There is not one of them, we should remember,—no, not even of those which may peculiarly appear the means of grace, which, in its liability to abuse, may not be considered as accompanied with this warning voice of the Divine Giver, — "Behold, I set before you a blessing and a curse."

DISCOURSE XIX.

HOPE FOR MEN A DUTY OF PIETY TO GOD.

AND HE SAID UNTO ME, SON OF MAN, CAN THESE BONES LIVE? AND I ANSWERED, O LORD GOD, THOU KNOWEST.—Ezekiel xxxvii. 3.

THE depressed and apparently hopeless state of the Jewish people, in their captivity and dispersion, and the power of God to raise them from that state, could hardly be more strikingly represented to the Prophet's mind than by the vision which he relates in the first part of this chapter. He found himself in spirit transported to a valley full of dry bones. He was addressed by a voice, asking whether it was possible for these bones to live. He answered in a manner implying a belief that even this might be, if God should so determine. He was then commanded to foretell, in the name of God, the renewal of life where every sign of it had so completely ceased. He obeyed; and as he prophesied, "there was a noise, and a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to its bone: and when he beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin

covered them above: but there was no breath in them." He was then commanded to call for the breath of life from the four winds, to come and breathe upon these inanimate bodies. So he called, "and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." He was then told that these bones were the whole house of Israel, who, in their dispersed and captive state, were speaking of their hope as lost, and to whom their national existence might well seem both dead and buried. But he was to prophecy unto them, in the name of Jehovah their God, resurrection from their national entombment, and restoration to their own land, and re-animation of the spirit which before dwelt in them.

The prophecy could hardly have been more impressively introduced, than by a series of images so completely in accordance first with the dejection and hopelessness of those to whom it was addressed, and next with their revived recollections of the power which they ought to ascribe to Him in whose name it was uttered. The vision represented Him clothing anew the dry bones with flesh and sinews and skin, and causing the breath of life to return into the bodies thus restored;—a work not too mighty, surely, for Him who first created them. The prophecy set Him forth, as purposing to gather again together his scattered people, and to place them once more in their own land:—a purpose, certainly, not requiring for its fulfilment, any greater exercise of His power.

The national state of the Israelites, as shadowed forth in the prophet's vision, could hardly seem more hopeless than may still appear the physical, intellectual, and moral condition, of thousands of human beings in our own day. Nor for such a condition need we send our thoughts to distant and uncivilized countries. We need only look among the population of our large towns, to find many, respecting whom to ask, whether they can ever be raised from the deplorable state in which they are sunk, would seem very like the question addressed to the prophet in the valley of his vision, "Son of man, can these bones live?"—And not a few, perhaps, even of those most benevolently inclined to their fellow-men, would not hesitate to pronounce a more positively desponding answer than that which is implied in the words, "O Lord God, thou knowest." The prophet would not declare impossible even the change of dry and scattered bones into living men. He chose rather to take refuge in the thought of the Divine knowledge and power. He would leave with God the determination of the question which had been asked.

And in this appears to me a hint of a useful lesson for ourselves—a lesson which I would endeavour, my fellow-Christians, to impress on your minds and my own—that of being very slow to abandon hope, in relation even to those who may seem to us the most ignorant, the most insensible, the most depraved of our race. Hope for men is a feeling more closely allied to a true reverence for God, than

despair. We often may not see how such hope is to be fulfilled. But rather than pronounce its fulfilment impossible, let us, even when to our apprehension there is least promise of that which we desire, accustom ourselves to say with the prophet, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

Such a habit of mind may be very valuable to ourselves. It may also make us much more extensively and frequently useful to others, than without it we should be.

It may be very valuable to ourselves, both as saving us frequently from the pain which, in a mind of any benevolence, must accompany the feeling of despair for a fellow-creature, and also as urging us to renewed and continued efforts in the prosecution of plans, which are not immediately successful to the extent that we wish.

There may be many who seem, by the very circumstances in which they are placed, by the habits in which they have grown up, by the natural tendency of all that they most frequently see and hear around them, irrecoverably fixed in their present condition. We may be inclined to think of that condition, as a death-like sleep of every faculty and principle essential to their improvement. And, indeed, such is occasionally described to be the state of many who appear to have no desire, interest, or sensibility left, but for the most gross, debasing, and hurtful excitements. "Can these bones live"?—Can there be an intellectual and moral re-animation of that which

seems so long and utterly dead?—To answer such a question with an absolute negative, is not the way to lessen the discomfort of recollecting, or of having from time to time forced upon our notice, the fact, that there are numbers of human beings in this deplorable condition. And, certainly, it is not the way to give us increase of strength and courage in our efforts in their behalf.—But if, instead of this decided and cheerless answer, we take refuge, like the prophet, in the thought of God,—if we recollect that Divine knowledge alone is competent to determine the limits of possibility, in the changes of which the creatures of Divine power are capable;—then, neither will the darkest aspects of human condition and character be without some gleams to break their general gloom, nor shall we ever be without motive to persevere in our plans and exertions for making the good which we desire, take place of the evil which we lament.

"O Lord God, thou knowest,"—appear to me words of power against all the doubts and objections that may rise up in the mind, in connection with the thought of attempting beneficial changes in society. They are words that have in them the germ of hope even against hope. They are words which, springing from a deep reverence for God, and a devout trust in Him, make despair for men felt to be a kind of impiety. Be the object that we propose to ourselves, on behalf of our fellow-men, ever so difficult of attainment—be the considerations ever so nu-

merous, that combine to represent them as incapable of the benefit which we desire for them,—yet how do we know that they are, in every instance, thus incapable?—how do we know that we shall not, that we cannot, be any where successful? Even though the change which we contemplate should appear as great, morally, as the change from dead bones to living men would be, physically, yet what change in the moral, any more than in the physical world, shall we take upon ourselves to declare absolutely impossible in the sight of God? "O Lord God, thou knowest"—is language which better becomes us, and at the same time is better fitted to keep us in heart and hope for our fellow-men.

Something like the spirit of this language there must have been in all who have been the first to conceive, or among the foremost in acting upon, the idea of attempting great and extensive reforms in the condition and character of society, as they found it in their day. To those who first had their minds awakened to the corruptions and oppressions of the Romish church, it may well have seemed a bold and startling question, whether the intellectual slavery and sleep into which the Christian world had so long been sunk, could ever be extensively exchanged for freedom and activity; and had they listened only to considerations of difficulty—had they contemplated only the numerous and time-hallowed influences on the general judgment, taste, feelings, and imagination, as well as the formidable array of wealth and

power which would be brought into action against them—it would not have been strange if they had shrunk from the attempt, as impossible, to produce so mighty and extensive a change. But they must have acted in the faith that it was not for them to pronounce such an attempt impossible. They must have girded themselves for the contest which they began, in the strength of a thought not unlike to that of the words,—"O Lord God, thou knowest."

And again, when the venerable and excellent John Wesley first felt the wish to supply the deficiencies of the religious institutions existing in his day, by going forth among those whom no influences of such institutions had reached, and carrying to them the ministrations which, however needed, they had never sought,—when he thought of the neglected, the ignorant, the indifferent, the vicious and hardened beings, whom it was his desire to rescue from their pitiable condition,—well might the question whether they could be so rescued, seem to him occasionally like the question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And not a few, even among the benevolent and pious of his contemporaries, would he have found, to join him in a desponding answer to that question, as he did find not a few among those who fancied themselves rational and enlightened, to ridicule, condemn, and oppose his attempt to make the experiment. He, too, must have been unwilling, to pronounce that impossible which he knew to be for man's good. He, too, must have found a refuge

from doubts and disheartenings about the event, in something like the spirit of the words, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

So again, at a later time, and in a distant country, when the mild and gentle Joseph Tuckerman conceived the idea of singly grappling with the gigantic evils of combined poverty, ignorance, irreligion, and vice, in the worst forms which the most neglected parts of a large town might present—when going forth alone into the most loathsome dwellings of want and depravity and misery, armed with no defence and invested with no authority, but that of the mighty love for God and man which glowed in his own heart,—he could not have taken counsel of any ordinary considerations respecting the feasibility of his plan;—he could not have believed what many, not in their own estimation superficial observers of human nature, would have been ready to suggest, of the labour thrown away, the disappointed and mortified feelings, likely to be the result. He, too, must have refused to acknowledge as impossible, what a voice within him maintained to be most desirable. He must have felt his hope for man a duty of piety to God. And though what he undertook at the suggestion of that hope, might not seldom appear like an attempt to bring life out of death, yet he must have been urged to perseverance in the attempt by something like the holy confidence of the prophet, as expressed in the words, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

The large success which, in these and other instances, has justified the unwillingness to give up the hope of favourable changes, however great and unlikely those changes might seem in prospect, would alone be a sufficient reason for endeavouring to form and maintain a similar habit of mind. But, even independently of success, who can doubt the value of such a habit to those who must sometimes have the darkest shades of human character brought under their notice, and who would not seek refuge from the pain of the contemplation in mere callousness and indifference? To hold fast by hope for our fellow-men, is the best way of preserving both our courage to face, and our energy to battle with, the worst evils to which they are liable.

And in proportion to the degree of this courage and energy, are we likely to use whatever opportunities we have of trying, at least, to counteract and subdue the evils which we observe, as well as to establish in their place the good which we desire. So that, as was said before, the same habit of mind which is valuable to ourselves, is fitted to make us much more extensively and frequently useful to others, than without it we should be.

Let us, then, teach and accustom ourselves to consider, as the best answer to all questions respecting the possibility of desirable changes in the condition and character of our fellow-men, that which, by retaining most hope for men, implies also most trust and reverence in relation to God. And if,

sometimes, in connection with appalling instances of the death-like stupor into which every valuable faculty of mind and heart may appear to have sunk, the question whether there can be recovery from such a state, does seem like the question addressed to the prophet, "can these bones live?"—yet, let us, like him, refrain from an answer which would exclude all hope:—let us, like him, take refuge in the reverential and confiding spirit of the words, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

Yes; He alone who formed the human mind, can know with certainty the limit of the changes which it may undergo, of the influences to which it is accessible. The great, the endless diversity of human character, even among those who may, apparently, belong to the same general class, makes it exceedingly probable, that there must be a corresponding variety in the means employed, to help on the progress of human reformation. But, instead of this, there is often a clumsy and lazy sameness in the means which are actually employed. They who are to be recovered from error, or roused from insensibility, are often treated as though they had all alike one feeling, by which to be addressed and influenced, —that of fear. Threats, rebukes, and punishment, are the soon exhausted and frequently ineffectual resource of many, for the treatment of all offenders. These, however, are far from being the only instruments used by those, who have been most successful in their cure of moral disorders. They have tried also, and

much more frequently, the gentle discipline of kindness. They have patiently watched the heart which they would favourably influence. They have sought in it for some still lingering element of good. They have gained a hold upon it by some kindly feeling at length discovered, and by this they have gradually led it on in a new and better way.

God's own method, too, in His general dealings with His creatures, is far more frequently that of kindness than that of severity. How rare, in the natural world, are the terrible exhibitions of His power, compared with the displays of His bounty! How seldom does the storm come to startle and affright! How countless is the number of peaceful nights and pleasant days! And how much more lasting is often the lesson taught by "the still small voice" of reflection on His innumerable benefits, than the occasional impression made, however it may be deeper at the time, by the desolations of the hurricane or the earthquake.

How much more abundant, also, in the moral world, are the uses which God makes of our hopes than of our fears! How much sweeter and more lasting are the pleasures which He has connected with the exercise of kind and generous feelings, than those which are ever experienced in the indulgence of a selfish, morose, and vindictive disposition! And when the great Governor of the moral world speaks to us more directly by the voice, and manifests himself more nearly in the character of his

beloved Son, how large is the preponderance of friendly promise and affectionate intreaty, over stern rebuke and awful threatening. How much more prominent is the Father than the accuser,—the Saviour than the judge!

Let more of the spirit which may be learned from the dealings of God with His creatures, be carried by men into their experiments for the recovery of their erring and offending fellow-men, before we despair of recovering even those who have most erred and offended. Let them be sought out with the earnestness and patience of the shepherd who goeth out into the wilderness, and resteth not till he hath found and brought back the wandering sheep. Let them be borne with, waited for, watched, under a deep sense of the joy which is in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Let all the variety of treatment be tried, which will not fail to be devised by the ingenuity of a real and affectionate concern for the erring and the miserable. Not till this has been tried, let us despair for our fellow-men. Nay; not even then. For there will still remain the influences which can operate within the secret mind—those thoughts with which it does not willingly let another intermeddle, and which can be known only to itself and to God. The recollection that there may be such thoughts, even in the mind which seems to us hardened and insensible, is another reason why, in answer to questions most like that of the voice in the prophet's vision, "Son of man, can these bones live?" we

should still preserve the reverential hopefulness of the prophet's words, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

The thoughts which have now been suggested appear to me suitable to those who are engaged or interested, as, I would hope, many of us are, in schemes and experiments for the moral and religious regeneration of their fellow-men. They are suitable to ministers of religion in relation to their wishes and hopes for the improvement of their hearers, as well as to their occasional discouragements on account of those whom they may seem as yet to have failed in favourably impressing. They are suitable to all who have relatives or friends, for whose moral and religious welfare they are anxious. The great lesson to all of us is the same—that hope for men is piety to God; and that there is to us no known limit of the good which may result from our persevering efforts for their improvement.

May God impress this lesson on all our hearts, and keep it to be our support, whatever difficulties and discouragements may sometimes attend upon our efforts! AMEN.

DISCOURSE XX.

THE HOME-CHURCH: AND THE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCES OF THE HOME AND THE CHURCH.

LIKEWISE GREET THE CHURCH THAT IS IN YOUR HOUSE.—Romans xvi. 5. (part).

THE house was that of Priscilla and Aquila, of whom the Apostle had just made very honourable mention in connection with his friendly greeting to them. We learn from Acts xviii. 2. that his acquaintance with them had begun at Corinth, soon after they had left Italy in consequence of a command by Claudius, the Roman Emperor, that all Jews should depart from Rome. From the same chapter of the Acts, (18, 19,) we find that they afterwards accompanied the Apostle in his voyage to Syria, and were left by him at Ephesus. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians (xvi. 19), written from Ephesus, we again have the names of these two disciples introduced, and in a similar connection to that which occurs in the text, "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord,

with the church that is in their house." And from their being themselves included among the persons greeted by the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans, which was written, probably, about two years later, it would appear that they had again taken up their residence at Rome; where, since the death of Claudius, they might no longer have the same apprehension of danger.

It seems, however, that in all their changes of abode, they always had their church with them. In their case, evidently, this word meant something very different from a mere structure of wood and stone. It was not a building made with hands. Banishment could not drive them to a distance from it. Settlement at a new place did not oblige them to wait any time for a new house of prayer. They were not dependent for their opportunities of social worship and edification, on the slow proceedings of carpenters and masons. Wherever they could find a dwelling for themselves, they could also find a temple for the living God. Wherever they could gather around them the members of their family, or receive the visits of like-minded friends, they could also at once establish a church of Christ. Wherever they could meet together in his name, in however small a number, there they could, with a faith and love like his, worship the Father who sent him, and cheer one another with mutual exhortations to remember and rejoice in his doctrines and promises.

Nor was theirs a solitary instance of such a home-

church. In his Epistle to the Colossians (iv. 15), we find the Apostle thus writing, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." And again, in his Epistle to Philemon, who lived at Colossæ, he addresses his wishes for grace and peace, not only to Philemon himself, and to two other friends mentioned by name, but also to the church in his house; that is, no doubt, to all who were accustomed to assemble there for Christian worship and edification.

Now at Rome, at Colossæ, at Laodicea, and other places to which the Apostle wrote, there were, undoubtedly, larger communities than those which he incidentally brings under our notice, as connected with particular households. Indeed his epistles are, for the most part, addressed to all the brethren collectively residing in any one place, and together forming what would also be called, and which, in fact, he sometimes distinctly calls, a church: as "the church of God which is at Corinth," and "the church of the Thessalonians." Aquila and Priscilla at Rome, Philemon at Colossæ, Nymphas at Laodicea, there can be no doubt, would be members of those larger communities, at the same time that they had also churches in their own dwellings. Their home churches would hardly be intended by them as rivals of any more extended brotherhoods which they had the opportunity of joining, or as substitutes for them, but rather as their auxiliaries and fosterers.

And, very probably, though we find distinct men-

tion of only a few individuals as having churches in their houses, the practice, in primitive times, would be very frequent, if not general. Every sincere and earnest Christian who had a home at all, would be likely also to desire that the presiding and pervading spirit there should be such as would, in fact, make it to himself, and his companions in it, a church. He would desire that they might live together under a continual and hallowing influence of the great truths and the glad tidings in which they believed. And they whose dwellings were large enough, would be glad to let others join with the members of their own families, in worshipping God, and communing together on the gracious words and wonderful history of the Lord Jesus.

This, in fact, must often have been the way in which communities of larger size were gradually formed. Individuals, themselves already believers, or, at least, willing to hear, admitted into their houses the missionary of Christ, that, to their families and friends, he might freely speak whatever was in his heart. They whom he succeeded in convincing, continued to meet together as they had opportunity, often, probably, for a while where they first met, for the purpose of strengthening each other's faith and devotion, and thus became a church in some particular house. As the number of such persons increased, a larger place was required for their joint assemblings, while still each separate household probably took care to have its own more especial occasions of

mutual improvement. Thus, from an aggregation of home-churches, grew churches of a more comprehensive character; but, evidently, with a likelihood of retaining their vitality of faith and fervour in proportion as their members still kept in exercise, at home, the earnest and religious spirit which first brought them together.

Traces of such a progress are distinctly visible in the early history of Christianity. The Apostles, we know, preached wherever they could find hearers. So long as permitted, they taught in the synagogues of the Jews. When driven thence, they taught in public places and private houses. To them the great purpose which they had at heart, made every day that gave them an opportunity of speaking to their fellow-men, a suitable time for so doing; and to them also, a willingness of others to join with them in worship, was a sufficient consecration of every place for the offices of worship. They sometimes converted thousands in a single day; but they thought not their labours lost when only a few could be brought to believe. They planted numerous churches; but they ceased not to recognise the sacredness and value of a church that could be gathered together within a single house.

Somewhat in a like manner as in the first age of Christianity, many of our non-conformist churches in this country had their origin. They grew out of the smaller assemblies which, to avoid the penalties denounced against every form of public worship except

that enjoined by the state, met privately in separate households. The ministers who were ejected from their stations in the national church by the Act of Uniformity, and strictly forbidden any longer to exercise their ministry, continued, nevertheless, in numerous instances, to teach, and perform the other duties of their office, in the houses of such families as were willing and not afraid to receive them.

Several of them found a permanent abode under the roof of their wealthier friends, whose dwellings, especially when in retired situations, they made the centres of extensive missionary exertion, and pastoral superintendence over the surrounding districts. Some of them who had houses and property of their own, made them, in like manner, available for the shelter and support of their more necessitous fellow-labourers, whom they thus enabled to go on with themselves in the work of a ministry which, taken up as they believed, in obedience to the call of God, their consciences would not permit them to lay down at the command of men.

Thus, notwithstanding all that prohibitory laws and severe penalties could do, the persecuted faith and worship continued to be kept alive and extended. They mingled themselves closely with the other associations and influences of home. They made the houses numerous in which it could be said, that they had churches in them. And when at length a time of greater liberty came, these home-churches were sources from which were abundantly supplied

not only numbers, but religious life and energy, to the larger communities which were formed of fellow-believers, and fellow-worshippers.

Nor did the separate households which furnished the members of these larger communities, lose, in those days of earnestness, their own religious character. For those were days in which the head of a household was not content with himself believing and worshipping, but took pains to have his whole house of one mind and one heart with him in this matter. Those were days, too, in which men treated religion as a reality worthy to be mixed up with the whole life, and "believed in God, not on Sundays only, but on all days, in all places, and in all cases."

Our pious forefathers might not be correct in all that they believed of God. They might admit into their views of His character more gloom than was desirable or warrantable. Their faith might be too deeply tinged with fear, and too little brightened with love. They might be wrong in some points of their theology. But surely they were right in their high estimate, nay, I would even say, in their theory of religion. They were right in thinking that a disciple of Christ, and a child of God, ought never to be without a serious remembrance of these relations,—that an heir of immortality ought not to live as though his whole inheritance and destiny were to be completed here. They were right in thinking that a regard to eternal verities, well deserves to be made a primary and pervading principle of man's moral

being. They were right to do their utmost for preserving in their hearts and in their homes, at all times, that spirit of earnest devotion, which they met at stated times to express and to strengthen in the society of their fellow-men. And if their days were those of greater readiness to engage in such joint worship, and greater fervour in it, than are now often found, it is not unlikely that one cause of this difference was, the greater frequency with which they brought with them to the house of public prayer, the religious thoughts and feelings cherished by their daily remembrance of God in their own homes. The church which was in each man's house, and the larger church to which he periodically came, were likely to have a reciprocal and beneficial influence upon each other; the one sending him to the public exercises of religion with a heart prepared to delight in them; the other sending him back again to his home, with renewed strength of desire and purpose to live there, with his companions in it, as fellow-disciples of Jesus, and "heirs together of the grace of life."

It may well be doubted, whether we are at all the better for the diminished frequency of such a reciprocal influence between the home and the house of prayer —the diminished frequency of instances in which the members of a household are also, practically, a church. We may have improved upon the theology of our forefathers; but we are, many of us, it is to be feared, far behind them in religion. We may have attained to a purer Christianity in our creed;

but we have by no means manifested, in connection with our clearer light, a warmth and life equal to theirs. Religion does not show itself among us, so often as it did among them, to be a subject of serious thought and earnest concern. It does not so often show itself among us to be the powerful and cherished influence which it was with them. And though we are ready enough to maintain that, according to our views of Christian truth, God is really more deserving of love, more inviting to hope and trust, more attractive to a filial reverence and adoration, it does not often, if ever, very clearly appear that He is, in fact, more heartily loved, more rejoicingly trusted, more reverently and earnestly served and honoured now, than He was in the homes and churches of our pious forefathers.

We sometimes hear or read lamentations over the decline said to be apparent in many of our churches. Perhaps, one great cause of this, if it really be the case, has been a previous decline of earnest and healthy religion in our homes. Perhaps we ought to look there, for the most effectual means and opportunities of reviving the religious spirit which we desire to see pervading our churches. That spirit can hardly be kept in vigorous life, by an hour or two spent in religious exercises on one day only of the week, even if that hour or two be regularly given to them. It requires, also, to be fostered at home. It requires, and surely it deserves, to have some mode, some supply, of daily exercise and nourish-

ment. The heads of households should not leave every thing, in the way of religious instruction, impression, and influence, to take its chance of being done for the members of their families by others, even though those others be, professedly, teachers and ministers of religion. They should, in their own homes, be its teachers and ministers by both precept and example. They should do something towards making their own houses, houses of praise and prayer —their own domestic circles, churches—their ordinary days, days hallowed and cheered by a devout and filial remembrance of God.

In short, it appears to me that there must be a large revival of home religion, and daily religion among us, before we can reasonably expect to see much revival of a church-religion, and Sunday-religion. The church, indeed, and the Sunday,—the house of prayer, and the weekly day of public worship,—may do something for interrupting the current of worldly thoughts, for soothing worldly cares, for suggesting useful subjects of attention, and preventing the need of religion, and the value of religion, from being altogether forgotten. But for the great work of maintaining the religious spirit in regular and progressive growth, they will do most in the case of those who bring with them a reality of that spirit from their homes, who bring with them a preparedness and earnest desire, there fostered, for continued progress in the love of God, and continued increase of likeness to Christ. In their case, the religious

exercises of the days when they assemble with the general community of their fellow-worshippers in the house of prayer, and the religious exercises of every day in their homes, may be expected to have a strengthening and encouraging influence on each other. But,—without any preparation of this kind in the home, without any endeavour there to foster a religious spirit, and to guard it from being chilled by the counteracting influences of worldly occupations and amusements—to expect that it shall be kept sufficiently alive and vigorous by a weekly, or, perhaps, less frequent visit to the house of prayer,—appears to me almost like what it would have been to expect, in days of old, that the fuel brought to be laid on the altar, should at once be kindled into a blaze, even though it had, for several days previously, been steeped in water.

How many, or how few of us, my fellow-Christians, already combine the influences of the church and the home, in our cultivation of the religious spirit,—how many, or how few of us, have learnt from experience, the efficacy of such a combination for such a purpose, I know not. But it may be well for us all to consider, whether religion be in us the earnest and powerful and abiding principle which it deserves to be, and is capable of being made; and if not, what we can do more than we are doing, both collectively as a Christian community, and severally in our respective homes, for raising it to its due place of honour and authority among us.

DISCOURSE XXI.

PRACTICAL USES OF RECOLLECTING OUR DESTINED SEPARATION FROM THIS WORLD AND FROM OUR FRIENDS.

THE EYE OF HIM THAT HATH SEEN ME SHALL SEE ME NO MORE. —Job vii. 8. (part).

THE circumstances in which the Patriarch is represented as placed, were likely enough to suggest a thought of this kind. But, independently of any such circumstances, and even when they are quite of a different character, the thought may sometimes occur of the entire separation which is surely awaiting us, from the scenes and business of this present world. In the very midst of its most cheerful scenes, and while we are actively and eagerly engaged in its business, such a thought may come across our minds.

We have been enjoying, perhaps, the warmth and brightness of a summer day. We have been saying to ourselves, how beautiful and pleasant is the light of the sun! how cheerful is the whole aspect of nature! And then we recollect that the same sun

will be shining as brightly when we shall be in our graves—the heavens and the earth will look as full of gladness when we shall have passed away.

Or we have been among the busy walks of men—we have seen them passing to and fro, in all the eagerness of active occupation—we have exchanged cheerful greetings with our acquaintances—we have enjoyed the lively and bustling scene;—and even then the thought has occurred to us, just so it will continue long after we shall be no more,—the streets will present the same living and moving picture—there will be like animation and excitement and competition of human feelings, opinions, and interests—when our remains shall be resting in their silent, and perhaps distant burial place.

Or we meet our fellow-worshippers in the house of prayer—we see them there gathered together from their respective homes—some in joy, some in sorrow—some thankful for events which have added to the brightness of their prospects, others mourning a recent bereavement;—we look upon this assembly of young and old, this meeting together of so many different families with all their diversified experience;—and we recollect that even so it will be when we, too, shall have been added to the number of those, for whom the tears of sorrow have been shed. Still will there be a like mixed company, still will there be like varied feelings in the house of prayer. But we shall have no part in its services. The song of praise, the out-pourings of supplication, the exhor-

tations of the Christian minister, will still be heard there. But our ears will be closed to the sound; our voices will long have been silent. "The eye of him that hath seen us will see us no more."

Perhaps, however, from all such scenes as have been mentioned, we may be shut out before we actually go down to the grave. The pleasant aspect of nature may be dimmed to our perceptions. The busy walks of men may become only annoyances to our languid and enfeebled frame. Lingering sickness, and growing infirmities, may prevent us from taking our accustomed place in the house of prayer. The world may be for us centered in our own homes. Our enjoyments, so far as connected with this world, may be limited to the pleasure of being watched and tended and nursed by those whom we love, and of showing ourselves gratefully and affectionately sensible to their kindness. But even that may be enough still to make life sweet, and to awaken some regret with the thought that the time is coming, when our place in this world, though it be only a sick-chamber, shall know us no more. Even in such circumstances it may be somewhat saddening to our natural feelings, to think of entire separation from the scenes to which we have been accustomed, and the beings whom we love.

How much less likely, then, is that thought to be welcome, when we are still in the full enjoyment of our homes!—when we have not merely pleasure from witnessing the pleasure of others, but are able

to take our full share in contributing to the pleasantness of the domestic scene. And yet even there the thought may occur, that the time is coming when we shall have no part in this interchange of kindness—when they who have been wont to greet our presence with gladness, will see us no more—when, if they who now form our family circle shall still meet together, our place in that circle will be vacant.

Such a time, we know, must come to every one of us. It may be long delayed. We may be spared to grow old, and to grow old with comfort and honour, amidst the esteem and affection of friends and relatives, and children, and children's children. But we must at last bid them farewell. We must close our eyes for ever upon the light of this world's sun. "As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more."

Now, when such a thought presents itself to the mind, what are likely to be the most soothing ideas that can connect themselves with it, in relation to the scenes and beings whom we are to leave behind? I speak not now so much of ideas suggested by our religious faith, as of those which may naturally arise from recollections of our own conduct. We shall behold no more the beauty of the earth, and the brightness of the heavens. But still, even with that thought in our minds, there may be pleasure in recollecting with how much innocent, with how much

pure and elevating delight, we have often contemplated the fair and wondrous scenery of this present world. We shall have no more part in all that is done under the sun—we shall disappear altogether from the walks of men. Nevertheless, it can hardly fail to be a satisfactory accompaniment of these thoughts, if we can tell ourselves that we shall leave there none whom we have intentionally injured, though many whom we have wished and endeavoured to benefit. We shall return no more to our homes. But such an anticipation does not prevent the comfort of thinking, if our conduct warrants the thought, that we have entitled ourselves to be remembered in them with kindness and gratitude. It cannot be otherwise than soothing to think that the beneficial effects of our presence in them, of our cares and counsels and example, may remain long after we ourselves shall have been removed. "The eye of him that hath seen us shall see us no more." But still it may give witness to us in the tear of affectionate remembrance. The ear may no longer hear us; but still it may fondly listen to every mention of our name, and still the heart may bless us.

The thought, then, of our destined separation from the scenes and business and inhabitants of this world, should not be a thought of mere dejection. It should be rather a thought awakening our desires, and quickening our endeavours, to make the most of the time which we are permitted to spend here—the most for rational enjoyment, for usefulness to our

fellow-men in general, for kind offices to those of them in particular, with whom we are more immediately connected. The thought of the season when we shall have done with this world, should not be a thought to make us in the least undervalue any of its real advantages, or to lessen our concern about any of our companions in it. Rather should this be a thought to urge us on in the faithful use of those advantages, and to prompt the desire of making our whole course through life as innocently pleasant and lastingly profitable as we can, to our fellow-travellers and ourselves. It is a reason for moderating our anxieties, when the subjects of them are things from which we are soon to pass away—when they are inconveniences and annoyances from which we are sure to be altogether freed. It is a reason for being patient and forbearing and forgiving, when they who happen to vex or injure us shall soon behold us no more. It is a reason for avoiding long interruptions of peace and good-will, when our whole time with our companions in existence is short. But the shortness of our time on earth, the certainty of a period when we shall be for ever separated from the scenes and business of this world, can be no reason for undervaluing or neglecting opportunities of usefulness, and kindness, and virtuous enjoyment, which will return no more.

We have hitherto been thinking of ourselves, as the persons who may individually apply the words of the text. But we may also think of the applica-

tion which they equally admit in reference to our friends. *They* may be the persons, who are about to be separated from the scenes and business of this world. They may leave us behind, and our eyes may be those which shall, on earth, behold them no more. Our homes may be those to which they will no more return, and in the midst of us may their accustomed place be left vacant.

And great may often be the change to those who remain behind. Perhaps the friends who may thus be taken away, are among those whom we have known from the earliest time of our remembrance—those whom we learned to love in the home of our childhood, and for whom our affection and esteem have gone on growing stronger and stronger, through every subsequent period of our lives. Perhaps, they are those with whom we have toiled and struggled together in many a busy scene, in many a difficult season, as well as rejoiced together in success and prosperity. Perhaps they are those, to whom not one of our joys or our sorrows has been a matter of indifference; and about whom, in return, our thoughts and our cares have been as affectionately busy. Perhaps they are those, in whose praise we have felt as though ourselves honoured, and in whose comfort and welfare our hearts have unfeignedly rejoiced. Such friends, the longest known, the most thoroughly tried, the most valued, may be taken from us. And the event may seem like the breaking of a tie that connects us with the whole of our past existence. It

may change the course of our daily thoughts and feelings. A blank may seem left where once the mind had always a source of affectionate interest. There will be silence where there used always to be a friendly voice to welcome us. There will be solitude where once we were sure to find cheerful companionship.

Now if such a time should come, what are likely to be our most soothing recollections in reference to those whom our eyes shall behold no more? Surely they will be recollections of the degree in which we have been able and willing to take part in making their existence pleasant to them—our recollections of the comfort and joy which we have been instrumental in securing to them. It cannot but be a great satisfaction, to think that we have showed our sense of their kindness and their value, while they were spared to us—that we have delighted in those services and attentions by which we could minister to their well-being—that they did not leave this world without a full and experimental knowledge of the high place which they held in our regard.

It would be sad, indeed, to remember them in connection with wrongs which we did them, with ungrateful returns for all their kindness, or with good purposes never carried into effect. But if, instead of this, we know that their confidence in us was not misplaced, their expectations from us were not disappointed,—if we know that their comfort in life, and their peace in dying, were increased by our continued

testimonies of respect and affection,—then we have indeed a treasure of sweet thoughts to mingle with our sorrow for their loss.

The great lesson that such considerations appear to me fitted to teach, is that of being careful to exercise whatever kindness we can towards our companions in this journey of life. We have been calling to mind the separation which awaits us all, from the scenes and business and friendships of this world. We have considered the two ways in which that separation may take place—either by our own removal from this scene of existence, or by that of our friends. In either case, we have seen how desirable it is that we should be governed, in all our conduct, by the law of kindness.

Does the thought ever occur to us that our own time may be short—that the eye which now seeth us may soon see us no more?—oh! then, let us lose no opportunity which we have of contributing to the comfort and welfare of those whom we love—no opportunity of paying back, whatever debts of service and goodwill we owe to any of our fellow-creatures. If our place on earth must before long know us no more, let us, at least, do our best to secure for ourselves a place in the affectionate and grateful remembrance of those whom we leave. If we look upon the world and the beings around us, with the thought that our part and business among them may soon be over, let that thought only quicken our diligence in the performance of any work by which we may hope

to leave the world, in some degree, better than we found it, or by which we may give occasion for an additional blessing on our memory. By all the pleasure which we ever had in witnessing the good qualities of our friends while they were spared to us, and by all the comfort which we have ever had, after their removal, in thinking and talking over the kindness of their dispositions, the integrity of their conduct, and whatever was estimable and amiable in their character, let us be incited to provide, in our turn, a similar pleasure and comfort for others in relation to ourselves.

Or does the thought occur to us, when we are in company with any of our friends, when we are looking upon the inmates of our homes, that they, perhaps, may not be long continued to us—that they may soon go down to those silent dwellings, from which they can return to us no more?—let them not go with any just cause to complain of our indifference to their welfare—of our neglect—of our unkindness. If, perchance, they have aught against us, let us not delay to enter into peace and reconciliation with them. If they have sacred claims upon us, let us not incur the risk of having to remember, when too late, that we left those claims unheeded. Let us prepare for ourselves the comfort of thinking, after they shall be no more, that they went from us in perfect friendship, with satisfied and thankful affection.

It should deepen every good impression made by

these reflections on our destined separation from our friends, to remember that the separation is not necessarily to be considered as extending beyond this present world. There is an important limit set to the meaning of our text, by the hope which, as Christians, we are encouraged to entertain. "The eye of him that hath seen us shall see us no more"—is an assertion which we can make in reference only to this present scene of existence. There is another scene to be disclosed, with respect to which we cannot say that, "as the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more." He shall, indeed, return no more to his earthly home; but we read of "a house not made with hands, a building of God, eternal in the heavens." Our thoughts, therefore, are left at liberty to follow, into regions beyond the grave, the friends whom our eyes shall here behold no more. Our hearts are encouraged to hope for continued opportunities of exercising those kind affections, which have here been sources of so much pure delight. If we have here rejoiced in pleasant and instructive converse with beloved and valued companions,—in that new world to which we shall awake from the sleep of death, there can be no want of subjects on which again to commune together. If we have here delighted to contemplate with them the beautiful and wondrous scenes of God's creation, or to meditate with them on the ways of His Providence, —in no region of God's universe, and especially in

none which He has prepared for them that love Him, can there be wanting displays of His power, wisdom, and goodness, on which we may again together fix our admiring and adoring contemplations. Or if here, with all the imperfections of our present faculties, with all the limits which are set to our powers of mutual aid, and with all the hindrances to which our kind wishes and intentions are liable, we have yet been ministers of great comfort and joy to one another—if we have here, as friends and relatives, been, really and largely, blessings to one another—how much more may we hope to contribute to each other's happiness, when all the frailties and infirmities of this our earthly condition shall have ceased —when "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality."

Let us think of this when honoured and beloved friends are taken away from us, and comfort ourselves with the thought. Let us think of it also when we are looking upon relatives and friends still living around us, and when the possibility comes across our minds that our time among them may not be long. Let it not be the mere effect of such a thought to depress and sadden us; but let it also animate us to the faithful performance of every duty, enjoined by the Christian law of mutual kindness. Let us find a holy pleasure in recollecting all that was good in those who are gone; and let us so live with those who remain, as to furnish them with rich materials for like recollections of us, when their eyes shall see

us no more. May God give His blessing to these words of exhortation, and His help to every good purpose which they have been the means of suggesting! AMEN.

DISCOURSE XXII.

THE REST WHICH REMAINETH TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

THERE REMAINETH, THEREFORE, A REST TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. —Heb. iv. 9.

THE word "rest" does not fully express the meaning of the original term which is, literally, as rendered in the margin, a keeping of a Sabbath. The writer, apparently, wished to convey the idea of something holy and spiritual in the rest of which he was speaking. He had alluded just before to the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, under the guidance of Joshua, and inferred that this could not be the rest to which the Psalmist long afterwards referred, in connection with the exhortation, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "There remaineth, therefore," the writer goes on to say, "a rest to the people of God;" but the very word which he used would imply that what he meant was no mere rest from long wanderings, such as the

Israelites of old found in the promised land, but a sacred and spiritual rest, such as that provided for the soul in its Sabbath communings with God.

In a degree, there is a rest attainable even here on earth, by those who may properly be called the people of God;—that is, by those who make Him their trust. In proportion as they really do so, they are likely to have their cares and apprehensions lessened about the events which may happen, and the turn which their affairs may take. Their faith in God's providence opens to them a refuge from their own uncertainties and perplexities. Committing their way unto Him, and following His guidance, they can rely on being conducted to some good end, though the various windings of their path, and overcloudings of their sky, may long conceal it from them. Burthens of thought, which might otherwise weary and oppress them, they can lighten by recollecting how continually He is watching over them and caring for them. And the sadness of heart which might otherwise often accompany a sense of their own ignorance and weakness, they can shake off in the strength of their confidence in His wisdom and His power. The stirrings, too, of impatience, which might not seldom be occasioned by long-continued trials, or by a quick and unlooked-for succession of them, they can check by a renewal of their applications to God for help to bear His will, and of their resolution, with His aid and blessing, to wait quietly the issue of His appointments.

This rest, which "remaineth to the people of God," even amidst all the changes and disturbances of the present life, is the subject of frequent promises and exhortations by the ancient instructors of Israel. "Thou", says the prophet Isaiah, addressing the God whose inspiration he felt within him,—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." And he follows up the assurance with the exhortation to his fellow-men, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." (Isaiah xxvi. 3, 4.) Frequent, too, and beautiful are the passages, in which both prophets and Psalmist speak of the refuge, the strength, and the defence, which are to be found of God; and bid us wait on Him, hope in Him, and rest on Him.

Nor can we be wrong in understanding the rest promised by Jesus, to "all who labour and are heavy laden," as including that quietness of mind, and freedom from dispiriting anxiety and fear, which is one effect of a hearty faith in the wise and good Providence of our heavenly Father.

Without such an inward source of peace, indeed, there may be no small trouble and disquiet, notwithstanding the most favourable circumstances of the outward lot. When the Israelites of old entered upon the possession of their promised land, when they had at length settled habitations, and fields and vineyards of their own, and pastures for their flocks and herds, and the heavens sent down their due pro-

portion of sunshine and rain, and the earth yielded its increase abundantly, we can easily imagine that they alone found true rest there, who brought its elements with them in their own minds and hearts. If they were any of them unthankful, covetous, envious, caring only for themselves, and fretful if others appeared more prosperous,—or if they were any of them in the habit of looking only on the dark side of things, apprehending evil from whatever quarter evil was possible, and magnifying every actual disaster,—they were not the persons, we may be sure, to whom Canaan would prove a land of rest.

In like manner now, it is not the outward lot, so much as the inward mind, that determines the degree in which peace of mind is found on earth. It is the heart which thankfully accepts every good as from God, that is most likely thoroughly to enjoy, and wisely to use, its portion of good. And it is the heart which devoutly and trustingly receives every evil, also, as of Divine and Fatherly appointment, that is most likely to extract a blessing even from its portion of evil. With respect to the allotments of both kinds, and however they may differ in the experience of different individuals, we may say alike, "there is a rest which remaineth to the people of God"; a rest to which even here on earth an entrance may be found.

But in a far greater dégree than can be experienced on earth, we may believe that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God,"—in that

portion of their existence over which change and decay and death shall have no more power. And this, probably, is the rest to which there is more especial reference in our text. This, at least, it is, to which our Christian faith enables us to look forward as that which, after the years of this present life, with all that they may bring of outward good or evil, shall have come to an end, awaits the children of God. For them—in the new scenes to which the light of immortality, with all its morning freshness and beauty, shall awaken them—there will be no more weariness of spirit, no more fainting of heart, no more cause for doubt, or care, or fear. There, in a far higher sense than can here be more than faintly imagined, the aged shall renew their youth, and the feeble put on strength, and perfect health succeed to pain and sickness, and every sight or sound of trouble for ever cease.

To a large class of human beings, those whose present lot is one of toil and struggle, and who, whatever may be their faith in God's Providence, have it sorely tried by the stern realities of their lot, this aspect of their future existence as a time of rest—conscious and blissful rest, from all the outward annoyances and hardships which in this world may be encountered—is likely to be peculiarly welcome. But, indeed, hardly any human being can pass through many years of earthly existence without having occasions, when it must be soothing and pleasant to think of life hereafter as secure from the trials and the

troubles, the changes and bereavements, the disappointments of hope and sorrows of affection, to which every condition of this present world is accessible. And when, in addition to whatever may have been the other trying experiences of a lengthened life, the infirmities of age have made their burthen more and more felt, well may there be a peculiar attraction in the thought, that "there remaineth a rest to the people of God." The mere contrast between the present, as liable to so much fluctuation and uncertainty, so much uneasiness and suffering, and the future as for ever exempt from them, would seem in itself, at first, sufficient to throw a cheering and inviting brightness over the prospect of the world beyond the grave.

Yet the rest which God intends for his people, is not likely to be a mere cessation from liability to trouble. Nor is it likely to be a mere passive reception of enjoyment. On the contrary, it may consist largely of activity,—in the exertion of strengthened and additional powers,—in the unfolding and application of both old and new capacities. In the present life, the most effectual rest is often found in change of occupation; the most thorough refreshment and relief to the mind is often experienced, in the diversion of its thoughts from one direction to another. Something of this kind there may be hereafter. Entered altogether upon new scenes of God's working and providence, we may find also new occasions for man's agency and reflection. Not

only may we find much to admire and enjoy, but much also to learn, and much to do. The prospect before us may be one of continued progress. The call upon our renewed consciousness of life, and health, and vigour, may be to higher and higher attainments in knowledge and self-culture, to richer and still richer harvests from the vast field laid open before us. The gift of immortality we may find accompanied with a corresponding gift of aspirations and yearnings fitted to keep us ever pressing forward from one degree of glory and blessedness to another, and not allowing us to stop any where in our course, as though there were no more to be known of God and His works, and no more to be done for the improvement of ourselves and our fellow-beings. And in this onward and upward progress, this hungering and thirsting of our souls, for ever gratified, and for ever renewed, after knowledge and goodness, we may find a true and blessed rest, a refreshment to our powers, preparing them for mightier and mightier efforts, for loftier and loftier flights.

Nor need we fear being wearied at last by this continuance of life and exertion. Existence, indeed, without end, progress without limit, are now thoughts too vast for our minds fully to comprehend. And, perhaps, in our attempts to comprehend them, we may sometimes feel them lying like a burthen on our minds. But let us think again how it is with us here, in reference to the possibility of finding ways of occupation, and sources of interest, for whatever

continuance we can imagine of healthy and vigorous life. Suppose that in this little world which we at present inhabit, we were assured of being enabled to explore all its wonders—suppose that we were gifted with the power of safely and swiftly passing at will from one of its regions to another—suppose that we had opportunities afforded us of becoming acquainted with all the various tribes of its inhabitants, of having intercourse with the wisest and best of its living minds, as well as studying the thoughts of departed wisdom and worth transmitted in their writings —could we not here find employment for a life long even as that of Methuselah, provided that with life, health and strength also of body and mind were continued? Or can we imagine any number of centuries great enough, thoroughly to exhaust all the sources of interest, which this single world of God's creation could supply to their explorer?

How, then, can we imagine resources for the employment of our time, and the exercise of our faculties, ever to fail us, where the whole universe may be successively laid open to our researches,—where world after world may become the subject of our observation and study,—where we may not only renew our intercourse with many whom we have here known and loved—having the delight of meeting them again to contrast with the remembered grief of losing them—but find free range permitted to us among all the people of God, gathered out from their different times and tongues and nations, and all able, in one

universal language—or in some other and still speedier, as well as more expressive mode of interchanging thoughts and feelings—to hold communion of mind and heart with one another;—yea, and where we may find ways of access prepared for us to still higher and higher orders of God's children, who may have much to tell us of His wondrous and glorious doings long before man or man's world existed, and who having thus been first our teachers respecting the past, may admit us to be their companions in watching and admiring the farther unfoldings of His wisdom, power, and love!

The very sight of the heavens on a star-light night may well abate any apprehension of not finding enough to employ and interest us in our future and immortal existence. We see there only a very small part of God's creation; and all that the most powerful telescope brings farther into view only gives a hint of regions beyond, as thickly sown with suns and their attendant worlds. Let but the thought be admitted that these are not always to remain unknown to us, that they may even become, in succession, the resting places of our journey through God's wonderful and beautiful creation,—and who can fear that there will be any deficiency of objects to engage our attention, and keep alive our interest, through even an endless existence?

Perhaps the common notions of future happiness, as consisting largely in a monotonous routine of praise and adoration, may have had some tendency

to make less welcome the thought of entrance upon another state of being. There may have been a secret feeling in many minds, that "the rest which remaineth to the people of God," may have too much in it of what is often meant by earthly Sabbath-keeping; too much of what, it is to be feared, has often made such days the most burthensome and wearying of the week. No wonder that such minds, or any minds, should shrink from the prospect of an eternity, to be spent as not a few well-meaning persons have taught that every Sabbath ought to be spent. No wonder that there should be but a feeble, if any, response in many hearts, to descriptions of heaven as a place of perpetual and universal assembly for mere praise and prayer.

But it should be remembered that praise and prayer are only the occasional expressions of feelings, which have many other ways of manifesting their influence. It should be remembered that man's noblest worship of God is offered, when he puts forth into full exercise the powers which God has bestowed upon him. It should be remembered that our truest acknowledgment of God is the intermingling of reverence and gratitude to Him, with all that we do and all that we enjoy. It should be remembered that there is, in fact, devout communion with God, in every direction of the thoughts to Him, in every feeling of admiration with which we look upon His works, in every act of cheerful obedience to His will, in every exercise of filial trust in His Pro-

vidence. Worship, praise, adoration, communion of this kind, may surely be imagined to go on for ever, to pervade the whole of an endless existence, without bringing any weariness into that rest which "remaineth to the people of God."

The great thing, however, to believe, with respect to this rest is, that it must, in reality, far transcend all that we can now imagine; that life after death is as much a sure appointment of God, as life on earth; and that He may be trusted for making it, through its whole duration, productive of abundant and even ever-increasing blessedness, to those whom He will acknowledge as His people and His children.

In this faith let us look forward to the time of our own departure, preparing ourselves for it by a life of filial obedience, trust, and love. In this faith let us take leave of those who, after such a life, have already entered into their rest.

DISCOURSE XXIII.

RELIGION A LIGHT WHICH SHOULD BE KEPT ALWAYS BURNING.

BUT THE WISE TOOK OIL IN THEIR VESSELS WITH THEIR LAMPS. —Matt. xxv. 4.

FORETHOUGHT during the present for the probable wants of the future, is an exercise of mind which, in relation to the things of this world, not a few are ready to commend. He is readily allowed to be wise who remembers in youth the requirements of a later season, and diligently prepares for them,—who remembers, in the time of health and strength, that there may come also a time of sickness and infirmity, and makes provision, while he can, for the wants of such a time. But, surely, he is in a still higher sense, wise, who, taking into consideration his whole nature, and what he may look forward to in another world, as well as the present, enlarges in proportion the range of his forethought, and includes, among the wants which he has to provide for, those of the undying soul as well as of the perishable body.

It is to this comprehensive exercise of the fore-looking faculty, that our Lord has repeatedly exhorted his disciples. He has not forbidden its application to the necessities of our animal nature, and earthly condition. At least, none of his words, when rightly understood, amount to such a prohibition, how strongly soever they may warn us against making such things the subject of anxious or primary consideration. But he would have us preserve a due proportion, in our exercise of forethought, between the material and the spiritual, between the transitory and the everlasting.

The parable from which our text is taken, is one form that he has given to this lesson. Wisdom is there exhibited as consisting in a preparedness for the emergencies of the time and situation. The wise are they who do not forget the main business which they have on hand, and who make a point of being provided with every thing which it is likely to require. They are not willing, if they can prevent it, to be taken by surprise. An event which, they know, may come suddenly, shall not, at least, so far as depends upon them, find them unprepared. The light which they are sure they shall need, they will, before all things, supply themselves with the means of keeping brightly burning. They take oil in their vessels with their lamps.

This wise and provident spirit may be carried with advantage into all our concerns. But we shall be most in agreement with the intention of our

Lord's parable, if we take it with us into the great business of moral and religious cultivation. The principles which we need for guidance in the way of holiness, for support at all times, and for comfort in seasons which would otherwise be dark and desolate, may be considered as that light of the soul which we should use every precaution to keep from going out. We should, on no account, expose ourselves to the risk of having nothing wherewith to feed the flame, just when we most require it to be strong and steady. We should not trust to the possibility of borrowing or buying the means of renewing its brightness, when the call for its instant use shall be sounding in our startled ears. No; we should dread, rather, lest our experience should be like theirs, who, while they "went to buy" oil for their dying lamps, lost the opportunity altogether of sharing the joy to which they had been invited, and were shut out into darkness by a door that opened not to their too late intreaties for admission.

That there is not more exercise of foresight in relation to that which is spiritual and everlasting, is, probably, in no small degree, owing to the strange misapprehension which often exists of religion itself. It is supposed, apparently, by many, to be something which can always, and in a very short time, be added to the other resources of the mind, whenever its aid may be needed. It is not considered by them in the character of "a lamp unto the feet, and a light unto the path," which cannot be too early kindled,

or too carefully tended and trimmed and nourished. It is not considered as that which should shed its mild and hallowing beams upon every scene and circumstance of life—which should mingle an attractive radiance with every direction of duty and manifestation of character—which should give some indication of its presence and power in the whole colour of the thoughts, words, and actions, and tinge with some hues of heaven, every day and hour of earthly existence. Alas! no; it is too often regarded rather as a light for which there is little use till every other is failing us, and which then can, in a moment, be kindled to dispel the gathering darkness, and, like a magic lamp, to scare away the spectres that might otherwise alarm the awakened conscience.

And where the mistake goes not to the whole of this extent, yet religion is often thought to consist rather in vivid flashes of devout feeling, than in the mild and steady shining of settled and practical principles. Its influence is not looked for in the habitual temper of the mind, or in the spirit manifested by the manner in which the business and duties of the most frequent recurrence, small as well as great, are performed. Its presence is not expected in the market, the exchange, the warehouse, or the workshop. These are not the places to which men in general think of taking their religion with them. Or, if they do, they are apt to suppose that it may be carried thither in a mere sanctimoniousness of phrase and manner; which, again, others are as apt to

account no better than Pharisaism and hypocrisy. Religion is often treated as though it were capable of a distinct existence in the mind, apart from all other subjects of attention, and as though it were merely to take its turn with them in the hours which it occupies, and the business of its own which it requires to be performed. Thus men have come to speak of religious duties as though they must necessarily be of a quite different kind from all others, and as though, in consequence, they must be confined to their own times and their own places. By a religious man is often found to be meant one who has a certain amount of belief, together, perhaps, with not a little uncharitableness for all who have less—or one who is known, with great regularity, to go through a certain round of prayer, public and domestic, and to employ a certain quantity of time in reading the Scriptures, or other religious books. And let me not be understood to speak disparagingly of any who earnestly use whatever they sincerely think an effectual means of keeping alive in their hearts a religious spirit. I am speaking of the mistake which confounds the means with the end, and hastily infers the entire presence of religion from things that, after all, are only partial expressions of it when real, and may be only unreal pretensions. Devout feelings certainly belong to religion—so does a firm and ardent faith—so does a delight in the exercises of praise and prayer—so does an earnest desire to learn and understand all that can be known of the Divine

character and will—so does a hearty and affectionate zeal to make others share with us in knowledge which we feel to be pleasant and precious to our own souls. All these things will naturally be found wherever there is the reality of religion. But they are not all that ought to be found—they are not all that should be looked for. If we limit our expectations to these things, we shall fall into a mistake that must be injurious to the true interests of religion. We shall aid in preventing ourselves, and our fellow-men, from making all the provision that is needed for the wants of our spiritual and everlasting nature.

What religion ought to be in its whole influence, is a light to show us our way on every occasion, in every scene and path of life—a light to make us clearly discern the direction of integrity, as that which alone we must follow in all our dealings with our fellow-men—a light to reveal the sanctity and obligation of truth and sincerity in all our words, serious or mirthful—a light to keep manifest before us the duty of neither doing nor saying anything which would be hurtful to the welfare, or unnecessarily painful to the feelings, of a fellow-creature—a light to display continually the beauty of every action, and every word, however seemingly unimportant, which tends to an increase of kind feelings, good thoughts, and righteous purposes, in the minds of human beings—a light also to disclose, as constantly surrounding, protecting, and observing us, the power, Providence, holiness, and love, of our heavenly Father.

Yes, this is the light that we need to have kept brightly and steadily burning within our souls. This is the light which we need to have the means of perpetually feeding.—And is it not when we consider religion in this character, as a principle which ought to be gently, but constantly exerting its influence,—diffusing itself, like beams of a peaceful and holy light, through the whole extent of our intellectual and moral being,—mingling, unobtrusively, but benignly, with the concerns of every day and every hour—imparting something of its own pure, cheering, and heavenly nature, to the whole conversation, temper, conduct, and affections,—is it not then, that we most clearly perceive both its intrinsic excellence, and its inestimable value to human beings?

Is not this, too, the character given to religion by the prevailing tendency of our Lord's instructions? Do we not feel, as we listen to him, that he would not have us merely reserve for it a corner of our minds, or set apart for it only certain days and hours of our lives, but would have us rather throw open our whole souls, our whole course of being and doing, to its constant influence? Yes; he would have us always provided with the means of keeping up its influence—of feeding the sacred flame which is to light and cheer our way through all the darknesses of both life and death, and to make clear before us the direction that must lead the disciple to the presence and the joy of his Lord.

This, too, is the character under which religion appears, when we look for its manifestations in Christ

himself. We cannot detect a single action out of the many which are recorded of him, nay, not a single moment of his life, as it is made to pass in review before us, which we can set by itself as having on it no influence of a religious spirit. He is indeed occasionally exhibited to us as having his seasons of devout meditation and prayer. But all that he does, all that he says at other times, is in perfect and beautiful harmony with those seasons. Every where he makes us feel that he is conscious of the Divine presence which is around him. And every where he makes us feel that his consciousness of such a presence is a cheering and sustaining principle, while it is also one which, instead of estranging him from human beings, only increases his patience and forbearance, even towards the worst of them. The religion of Jesus, as manifested in Jesus himself, is indeed a light shining mildly and steadily on every scene in which he was placed, and on every being by whom he was approached. It is a light which, undimmed and unwavering, gives abundant proof of having been constantly supplied with all that was needed to keep up its brightness. He had well practised the lesson of wise and holy forethought which he taught to others. He had taken care to have "oil in his vessel with his lamp."

The character under which we have been considering religion, and under which it so manifestly appears in both the instructions and the conduct of

our Lord himself, is well fitted to suggest the inference, that the more completely religious, in the proper sense of the word, any one is, the more calm and uniform will be the influence of the faith and hope within him on all his habits of mind and life. What we may expect in him will be rather the sustained and tempered fervour of an habitually devout spirit, than occasional outbursts of enthusiasm—rather the serene and even tenor of "a godly, righteous, and sober life," than sudden impulses and violent efforts—rather the steady operation of great and good principles, than the vehement expression of strong feelings. True religion flows on in the soul with too deep a stream, to make the noise which is characteristic of the sudden and soon passing torrent. It covers and keeps down by the weight of its waters all that, to a shallower stream, would be occasions of commotion and conflict. Its supply is from perennial springs, rather than from the influences of particular seasons. It is a river of God, always full, and always in progress towards a boundless ocean.

Or, to use language more in accordance with the suggestion of the text, true religion is a light within the soul, long kindled, and shining with a fulness and steadiness of ray, which proves sufficiently with what care it is tended, and with what regularity it is supplied with oil. It shines as that which is kept for habitual use, rather than as that which is suddenly kindled for display. It is mild and benignant, rather

than dazzling. It is the light of a home within which dwell peace, truth, and righteousness, "faith, hope, and charity."

They who are wise for the whole of their nature, and for the whole of their being, will be careful to provide themselves with the means of keeping up this light within their own souls. They will be careful always to have oil in their vessels with their lamps.

We often hear of the preparation which should be made for death. And we hear of it not seldom as if it were the more necessary, in proportion as the time of death is nearer at hand. But, according to the view which has now been taken of religion, the best preparation for death is begun, as soon as we begin to make what is also the wisest provision for life. We prepare, in fact, for all the great changes and emergencies of the future, when we kindle and keep alive within us the light of a religious spirit, and use that light for our guidance in all our employment of the present. The maintenance of that spirit in all its moral influences, as well as in its devotional fervour, is preparation for both life and death, for both time and eternity. The more life is brightened and adorned by that spirit, the less need is there for anxiety about the time or manner in which death may come upon us. And the less anxiety there will, in general, actually be. To the truly religious mind there will go forth from the light within a brightness upon all around in the present,

a brightness upon all in the future. The prevailing colours cast on every scene and season, will be those imparted by faith and hope and love. God will every where be seen and trusted. Life will be chiefly viewed as a progressive conformity to His will:—death as a transference of that progress to new modes and occasions of serving and praising Him.

The religious spirit, as it may be learned from the instructions of Jesus, as it may be seen in his whole conduct—would that I had a power of persuasion sufficient to make all my hearers resolve to take this for the light of their souls, and to keep it there by every possible care! But, at least, I may hope that in some that purpose will be awakened, and in others strengthened. I may hope that, where the sacred flame has been already kindled, something has been done to feed it.

God grant that it may be continually fed with all needful supplies, and go on shining more and more brightly, till its beams shall mingle with the general and everlasting radiance of heavenly mansions!

AMEN.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH.

FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN.—Philipp. i. 21.

WHEN we sit down quietly to study this world of human beings, what a strange medley does it sometimes appear! Human life—how various are its aspects! and human character—through how wide a range of thoughts and emotions, from the loftiest hope and warmest admiration, to the lowest contempt and shame; yea, to the extreme of abhorrence and loathing, does the contemplation of it carry us.

In one direction we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact, that there are many thousands of our fellow-creatures continually passing through this scene of existence, with whom "to live" is ignorance, depravity, a constant war against others, an accumulation of wretchedness on themselves. In another direction, we see many with whom "to live" is a mere succession of insipid frivolities; a parade of

bustle and business; without usefulness, and without honour; an insect's flutter, requiring no more than an insect's mind, and seeming to deserve only an insect's destiny. We turn from these, and see many with whom "to live" is to perform the office of mere machines; to spend day after day in the same unvarying and, apparently, unawakening round of mercenary drudgery; to reckon the value of time, and the progress of improvement, solely by their pecuniary gains and layings up, with the interruptions, perhaps, of some questions, but those no higher questions than, "what shall we eat"? or "what shall we drink"? or "wherewithal shall we be clothed"? Again, we see many on whom these questions are forced, by a stern and bitter necessity—many with whom "to live" is to maintain a hard and anxious struggle for existence—to count their days by "the evil thereof"—to mingle their thoughts of to-morrow with frequent uncertainties how to provide for the beings who will be crying unto them for bread.

These are some of the aspects under which human life appears, and how much is there in them to cast us down from high thoughts of human nature and human destiny! If we looked only at them, how often we should be inclined to think of ourselves as belonging to a contemptible or pitiable, a worthless or miserable race of beings!

But, on the other hand, how beautiful and glorious does human life appear in some of its varieties!

How much brightness do we see diffused around its present condition! How much promise of a still greater brightness in its distant prospect! What overflowings from it of blessings and gladness in its course! What signs of its gradual approach to some wide ocean of purity and joy, with which it is to be for ever mingled! Mark the virtuous man, and behold the pious man, for the progress of that man is pleasantness, and his end is peace. Look upon the families of those who dwell together in unity, in the love of God, and of one another. Look upon those who have been blessed with the opportunity, and the disposition, to enrich their minds with knowledge, to feed their souls with pure and strengthening thoughts, to exercise every valuable power of their understandings, and to open a free course for the kind and cheerful and amiable affections of their hearts. Yes; for there are those with whom "to live" is to dwell continually in the light of a Divine and a benevolent presence—to have, in every sense and every capacity, an inlet for gladdening and improving influence—to have their understandings awake to behold and enjoy the wondrous and glorious things which God has written of Himself, in His works and in His word—to count their days by His mercies, and number their years by His teachings—to be blessings and comforts, and examples and guides, to their fellow-men—to display the beauty of truth—to give a living form to virtue—to vindicate and endear religion—to glorify God.

Nor is it necessary to this attractive and noble aspect of human life and human character, that high station and illustrious name, and prosperous circumstances, and a multitude of friends, and exemption from pain and sorrow, should combine, like so many concentrated beams, to brighten one particular lot. True, we are more ready to call those happy, whose sources of intellectual and moral enjoyment are accompanied with a large command over the outward means of ease and comfort. We are more ready, in our pictures of life, as it seems to us most desirable, to introduce the scenery and colours of an earthly paradise. And even in the wreaths which we twine for our images of virtue, we are apt largely to intermingle the flowers of earthly joy. But in the humble abode of poverty—amid conflicts with trial and sorrow—in thankless labours, unrequited struggles and unacknowledged sacrifices—yea, "in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses"—in weariness and painfulness, "in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness," —may sometimes be exercised the principles which form the noblest exhibition of human character—the principles which, whenever we behold their operation, make us bow with reverence before the greatness to which our natures may be exalted. How do our souls confess the dignity and glory of life, how much do they find to feed and cherish their best thoughts of man, when they contemplate, as

a specimen of what he may become, the faithful and persevering missionary of a benevolent God, bent upon fulfilling the duties of his arduous ministry; preferring them to every consideration of his own ease or safety; giving to them his whole heart, and mind, and strength; making them the great object of his existence, so that he could truly say, "to me to live is Christ."

The aspects under which life may be contemplated, and the feelings which may be awakened by the contemplation of it, are hardly more various than those which may be occasioned by our thoughts of death. Here, also, is a wide range for our meditations; and according to the objects on which we fix our attention in that range, may we be filled with melancholy, or encouraging hints for our reflections; with indifference, or doubt, or fear,—or hope, and confidence, and exultation. To die—how many there are with respect to whom there appears hardly any more reason why this should not be the total extinction of their being, than there is with respect to what are called, though sometimes it would seem unjustly, the meaner tribes of animated nature! Shall the birds of the air and the beasts of the field lie down and perish? Why not they also, whose wishes and exertions, whose pursuits and pleasures, seem all entirely centered in their present existence? Shall the gay creatures, that buzz and flutter through their hour of summer sunshine, have no renewal of their life? Why should

they who only live for a round of frivolity and folly? Or shall the more useful animals, who help man in his labours, his patient and unmurmuring servants, have no distinction in their fate over those that merely live for their own pleasure? Why should those human plodders who have hands, and eyes, and ears, and hearts, solely, it would appear, for the business and profit of this world—as, like the animals which they employ in their service, they seem content in the intervals of their toil, merely to eat and drink and sleep—why should they not also die like them? It is not by contemplating such specimens of man, that we shall be most ready to read in him the beginning of an unfinished history, or that we shall catch many hints of an immortality in reserve for him. And if we look among the children of want and suffering, among those to whom "to die" will be at least to lay down a hard and grievous burthen, to rest from weariness and trouble; yet how often may we look without finding reason for a hope that it will be any thing more! If they are murmuring and fretful, if they have given no signs of a disposition to draw a moral good from a natural evil, what encouragement have we to think that, in any great and glorious sense, to die will be to them a gain? Still less, if we look at the more depraved and actively injurious of our race—if we look at those over whom fierce and brutal passions reign with unresisted sway—those who are a terror or a shame to others, and a misery to themselves,—

still less shall we gather from our contemplations ideas of comfort to mingle with the thought of death. —"To die"—what must it be to them? If it is not total forgetfulness and extinction, if there are dreams that may break in upon that sleep, alas! what gloom, what horror arises in the thought of the dreams, and more than dreams, by which their consciousness may be renewed!—"To die"—what is it to those who are living in utter disregard of God or man, reckless of purity and righteousness, of justice, temperance, mercy, and piety, abandoned to the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and all the pride and all the selfishness of a carnal and wicked heart—to them what is it to die, if there is indeed a judgment to come, and if in that judgment they will have to give account of their deeds to a holy and righteous God!

But, on the other hand, in the lives and characters of some, how much there is to make us think of death with complacency! How much that, in a manner, compels us to think of it only as a shadow, which veils from mortal eyes a beauty and a glory surpassing all that they have yet looked upon, and perhaps too bright for them to look upon! Yea, how much, I may even say, which gives softness and beauty to that shadow itself, making it seem only like one of those cloudy curtains which the sun, as he sinks below our horizon, so often draws around him, leaving on it a brightness which assures us that though invisible to us, he is still shining in another sky. Yes, when life has been a constant progress in

all that can ennoble human nature and bless human kind—when the mind has preserved its desires of intellectual and moral improvement—when it has gone on adding to its sources of pure and spiritual enjoyment—when the heart has gone on cherishing a still stronger and larger benevolence, proving itself a growing fountain of kind, gentle, and generous affections—when the soul has risen to still closer and closer communion with its God, approached more and more to a unity of will and purpose with Him, reflected more and more of that brightness which dwells in Him, seemed more and more to be filled with the spirit of a new and heavenly existence—when sufferings and trials, as well as hopes and joys, when seasons of adversity and seasons of prosperity have all been productive of moral good, and, like winter and summer, rain and sunshine, have all contributed to the richness of the moral harvest—when man is, in fact, a being such as blessed and immortal natures may look upon with delight, and welcome to their society,—it is impossible to believe that a benevolent God will destroy so beautiful, so glorious a work of His hands—it is impossible to think that death is any thing more than the invisible messenger whom He sends to gather together His elect; to tell His servants that their "welfare is accomplished;" to summon His children to the everlasting mansions prepared for them. "To die"—what is it to those who have no wish so earnest, as that they may bear what God appoints, and do what He commands, and

be what He sees it their interest to be? "To die" —what is it to those who value their existence in this world chiefly by their opportunities of doing service to God and man? What is it to those who accept their duties of patience, virtue, benevolence, and piety, as their own proper care, and leave the care of their happiness to God? Let the answer be given by one who himself acted on these principles. "To me," says the Apostle in our text, "to die is gain."

It may be said that there was a peculiar sense in which these words were applicable to the Apostle. And so there was. He was, at the time, in imprisonment at Rome, and expecting, probably, to appear as a criminal before the judgment-seat of the Roman Emperor. What might be the issue, he knew not; but, though the alternative was no less than life or death, he was prepared. And the text then tells us why. It was because he had no object in life but to fulfil his duties as a disciple and minister of Christ, and no thought of death but as a certain advantage.

But though there was this peculiarity in the circumstances of the Apostle, and though the general situation of believers in those times was such, as to often give them reasons, which we have not, for thinking of death as a gain, I see not why the great principles which are implied in this view of life and death, should not be adopted and carefully cherished by believers in all times. For there is a sense in which every one of us may make the words of the text his own.

If we are anxious to inform ourselves what is the will of God concerning us; if we would know, in order that we may do, what He requires of us as our best service; if, for that purpose, we set ourselves diligently to study the mind and doctrines of Jesus Christ; if we value and rightly use our opportunities of moral and religious knowledge; if we are deeply impressed with the conviction that life is an important season of training and preparation, of filling ourselves with those affections which will form the happiness of our everlasting state—then, surely, there is a sense in which we may say, that to us "to live is Christ." We look to the instructions and example of Christ, as containing our rules of life.

If, again, in our respective situations, we are humbly endeavouring to exercise our Christian principles; if we study with the enlightening spirit of a Christian faith and a Christian wisdom, what use we can derive from the various appointments of Providence, how we can improve ourselves or do good to others by the dispositions which we cultivate and manifest; if we accept the worldly good that is bestowed upon us with a mindfulness of our obligation to be stewards of the Divine bounty; if we make the joys and comforts of our lot the nourishment of a grateful, and cheerful, and benevolent piety; or if we take care that afflictions and distresses come not upon us in vain, but that they contribute to the perfecting of patience, and the strengthening of hope, and the deepening of faith—then, again we may say,

that to us "to live is Christ." We look to the Christian character as the great and glorious object of life.

Farther, if we are experiencing the blessedness of the Christian spirit; if we are enjoying that love and peace and contentedness, and cheerful confidence, which are its fruits; if our greatest pleasures are those which we find in the exercise of piety, in the comprehensive views and encouraging prospects of a benevolent religion, and in the kind thoughts and affections thus fostered to our fellow-men; if our hearts can be raised to their highest flow of devout and kindly feeling by their love to the God who careth for all, and to the Saviour who died for all—then, too, we may say, that to us "to live is Christ." We look to the God and Father of Christ as the strength, the refuge, and the joy of our souls; we find in the knowledge of the only true God, and of Him whom God hath sent, the principles of eternal life, the blessedness of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

Lastly, if we consider ourselves bound to do all we can for the promotion of Christian truth; if we are earnest in our desires and endeavours to persuade men to come and glorify with us our Father who is in heaven; if we are zealous to remember what we can do by word or deed, by mild instruction, by affectionate exhortation, or by the silent but powerful influence of example, to vindicate and recommend the Christian name; if we are truly Christian advocates, Christian preachers, and Christian

missionaries, to our families, to our friends, to our neighbours, to the world at large, by catching every opportunity of pouring into the minds and hearts which are open to us, the influences of a liberal knowledge, an enlightened faith, a cheerful hope, and an ardent charity—then, also, we may say, that to us "to live is Christ." We live to carry on his work—we live to breathe around us his spirit.

And who can deny to those who are entitled to say this, the right of saying also, "to us to die is gain"? What can he lose by death, who has made Christ the rule of his life? Will not He who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, restore those also, who, in the faith of Christ, have trusted their souls to a merciful Creator? Will not He who received the captain of our salvation from suffering into joy, receive also into a participation of the same joy his faithful followers?—Yes, to the humble Christian, "to die is gain." It is so with respect to his desires of instruction. Now he knoweth in part, but then he shall know, even as he is known. It is so with respect to the trials which are here part of his discipline. There shall be no more pain, nor sorrow, nor tears,—no more darkness and perplexity, —but God shall be the everlasting light and comfort of His children. Or, is the Christian's lot in this world pleasant and prosperous? Let him enjoy it without apprehension of loss by death; for even with respect to the purest sources of enjoyment, to die will be gain—it will admit him to joys in which

there can lurk no temptation, and over which there can come no cloud—it will admit him to affections in which there can be no change, and from which there can be no separation—it will admit him into that holy and universal church, in which there will be no dissensions, no interruptions of the general love and harmony, either by the worldly and corrupt designs of the hypocrite, or by the mistakes and weaknesses of the sincere. And, perhaps, the Christian who is most desirous of improving his present existence, perhaps he with respect to whom it seems most reasonable to say, that with him "to live is Christ," may be conscious how much weakness and mistake are continually mingling with his endeavours to serve his Lord—perhaps he may be conscious that, after all, his is but a feeble and trembling virtue—his but an imperfect faith and inconstant service. While he lives, he knows that he is liable to the assaults of sin—that however firmly he may seem to stand, he must yet take heed lest he fall. But the trials of faith and the power of temptation cease with the present existence. By the security, then, and perfecting of present virtues, by the seal of safety and permanence which it sets on pure and holy affections, by the final stop which it puts to the sources of moral danger, by the glorious confirmation which it brings of faith and hope, to die must be gain to him whose earnest wish and great object it is that with him to live may be Christ.

I would conclude with pressing on your attention

the important truth, that in proportion to the earnestness of that wish, and the successful pursuit of that object, must be the certainty that to die will be gain. The Apostle's view of life and death is one which connects closely together the improvement of the present, and the preparation for the future—which, in fact, exhibits these two things as one and the same. It is he who can say, "to me to live is Christ," that is alone warranted by the example of the Apostle to say also, "to me to die is gain." A life of humble virtue, of active benevolence, of cheerful piety—a life which most makes itself a blessing to the present world—a life which gathers around it here most of the beauty and glory that can adorn the human character, is at the same time treasuring up for itself most of the brightness and blessedness which the everlasting world has in reserve for man.

The practical inference is obvious. Your own hearts will feel it. May it be deeply impressed upon the hearts of us all. May we all take up that comprehensive and noble view of life and death which guided the Apostle. May we be sustained in our trials, animated in our duties, strengthened in our dangers, guarded in our joys, and comforted in our sorrows, by the sublime and glorious spirit of the words, "to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

DISCOURSE XXV.

THOUGHTS AT THE CLOSE OF FORTY YEARS SPENT IN THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

I THINK IT MEET, AS LONG AS I AM IN THIS TABERNACLE, TO STIR YOU UP BY PUTTING YOU IN REMEMBRANCE.—2 Peter i. 13.

So wrote the Apostle to the partakers of a like faith with himself, and among whom he appears to have considered his office chiefly that of keeping before their remembrance the practical fruits of which their faith and hope ought to be productive. So wrote he, too, when evidently not expecting a much longer continuance of opportunities for the work in which he was engaged. "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me."

The words have seemed to me not an unsuitable introduction for some thoughts which have suggested themselves to me, in connection with the fact, that

this present Sunday completes the term of forty years, during which I have ministered to the congregation assembling in this house of prayer. My first sermon, after my appointment as minister, was preached here on the first Sunday of April, in 1811; and this last Sunday of March, 1851, still finds me an occupant of the same pulpit.

It is, naturally, a time that makes me think of the many changes which have occurred among my hearers during that long interval—changes from childhood to maturity, from youth to age, and, in not a few instances, from the present world to another. It makes me think of the many whom I have known in their times of health and strength, seen afterwards in their times of sickness, taken leave of on their dying beds, and followed, sorrowing, "yet" not without hope, to their graves. It brings back fresh to my remembrance, many faces of former friends and fellow-worshippers, for whom I now look around in vain; while, in their places, I see not a few whose whole existence has been of much shorter duration than my ministry. It makes me realise the fact, that the congregation with which I am now connected, is little more than nominally the same with that which, at first, I beheld around me.

And yet these changes have been so gradual, new associates and friends have so quietly glided into the place of their predecessors, children of former families have so silently grown up to become themselves heads of other families, that I do not feel as

though the tie which was first formed, in a great degree, with another generation, had ceased to connect me with the present, or as though I were less your minister, my fellow-Christians, than I was, forty years ago, the minister of those who then met together where we are now assembled. Indeed, if greater seriousness of thought on the proper work and objects of the Christian ministry, and deeper feeling of responsibility for a faithful performance of its duties, have been the effect, as I trust they have, of the studies pursued and the experience acquired during those years, I may more truly account myself your minister than I was theirs, to whom I came with all the disadvantages of untried youth, and, in many respects, unformed judgment and character.

But it is not a time for thinking only of changes, such as the course of years is sure to bring about in any considerable number of human beings. It is a time, also, for thinking with gratitude of the many bounties and mercies which I have experienced and witnessed since the commencement of my ministry. If I have known but few homes which have not had their seasons of anxiety, apprehension, and sorrow, I have also known but few which have not, apparently, enjoyed much longer seasons of quiet and comfort. It is by no means with a darkened aspect, that life presents itself, in my general recollections of those with whom my relation of minister has brought me into acquaintance. There have been

among them many whom I remember now with far more pleasure than sadness,—many who made themselves valued and beloved while they lived, enjoyed heartily the portion of good which fell to them, performed cheerfully the work which they had to do, took patiently their occasional lot of evil, and were not afraid, when God called them away, to trust themselves in His fatherly hands. Nor have they been always scenes of prosperity and seasons of health that have left a pleasing impression on the memory. I have come away from dwellings visited by affliction and adversity, cheered by the fortitude with which I have seen such visitations borne; and I have come away from chambers of sickness where thankfulness for God's past benefits has been a much more manifest feeling than any impatience, or disposition to complain of present sufferings. Nor has what I have seen of death itself tended, on the whole, any more than what I have seen of life, to leave an unpleasant impression on my remembrance. I have known it not seldom appear "beautiful in its season;" and that not merely in the case of those who have gone down to the grave full of years and of honours, but also in the case of those who have fallen asleep at a much earlier period. I have repeatedly seen and felt the beauty of that last, serene repose, on the countenance of youth as well as age, of infancy as well as maturity,—that smiling repose from which every trace of suffering has vanished, and in which dreams

of heavenly peace and blessedness have almost seemed to have begun.

If, passing from the pleasing and thankful impressions left on my mind by what I have witnessed in others, I think, (as the retrospect of so many years may naturally lead me to think,) of the blessings which, during the time, I have myself experienced, I cannot but reckon among my especial causes for gratitude in connection with my office as a Christian Minister, the liberty in which the ministers of the congregation assembling in this house of prayer have always been left, of pursuing their inquiries after religious truth, unfettered by any previous pledge to find it only in this or that particular creed, and of preaching whatever, in consequence of such inquiries, appeared to them the Gospel of Christ and the truth of God. Perhaps, indeed, that liberty may seem to have been greater when they who met here for religious worship and instruction, were content with the simple and comprehensive name of Protestant-Dissenters, and before the zeal of some in later times, together with the Act of the Legislature for the protection of Dissenting Chapels, fastened upon this house of prayer and its occupants, the distinctive and narrower name of Unitarian. But, practically, there has been no abridgement, and, in my own case, at least, I will take care that there never shall be any, of the liberty allowed to your ministers, of preaching that only which they conscientiously believe to be Christian and vital truth. When first invited to occupy this pulpit, I was not

even asked by any one what was my particular belief. It was known that I had completed my course of study in a college intended for the education of Christian ministers. It was ascertained, most probably from my instructors there, or at least, from some who knew me, that I appeared really desirous of devoting myself to the duties of such an office. An opportunity had been given to the congregation, before they invited me to become their minister, of forming a judgment on my pulpit services. But, as I said before, no question was asked me what I believed—no promise was required from me, no condition made, in reference to the doctrines which I should preach. The trust appeared entire, on the part of those who were to hear me, in my wish and purpose to be guided, in this respect, by my convictions of truth and my sense of duty. And the more deeply was the obligation felt, on my part, not to disappoint or abuse their trust. In the first sermon which I preached, after entering upon my office, I did, of my own accord, make a promise, I did give a pledge, and I solemnly called upon God to witness it, and so to help me as I should keep it. The promise was to this effect, that I would preach such doctrines only as, after careful inquiry and attentive study of the Scriptures, should appear to me true and important; and that from so preaching I would endeavour not to be turned aside, either by the desire of any man's favour, or by the fear of any man's reproach.

That promise, I humbly trust, I have been enabled

to keep; and a frequent cause of thankfulness it has been to me in my religious inquiries, as well as in my preparations for the pulpit, that I was not bound by any narrower promise, that I had not to consider whether, by coming to any particular conclusion, or by preaching in accordance with it, I should violate any condition imposed on me by others, or break any pledge voluntarily given by myself. I rejoiced in having my range of study and thought and speech unrestricted by any previously declared assent and consent to articles and confessions of faith; or by any tacitly understood necessity of finding neither more nor less in Christianity, than could be made to harmonize exactly with the interpretations and doctrines in favour with some particular denomination of its professors. I rejoiced in feeling that I might freely and fearlessly speak to my hearers on all which I should find my own judgment approving, and my own heart valuing, as moral and religious truth; and that they, as having also understanding, and responsible to the same God for its use, would exercise their own judgments and their own hearts, in duly considering whatever I should thus speak. I rejoiced in feeling that I was not to be either "a lord over their faith," to save them the trouble of thinking, or a slave and flatterer of their foregone conclusions, to echo back only their own thoughts—but a friend and brother and fellow-learner, to give them honestly and unreservedly the results of my own meditations and inquiries, in our joint pursuit of the things that appertain to truth and godliness.

While I am thankful for this liberty in which I have been left as an inquirer and a preacher, I am thankful, also, that the path of inquiry has not led me to any great or painful divergence from the simple and comprehensive faith of my earliest years. Brought up from my childhood in the belief that "there is one God," and that He is truly a Father, ready to receive all who will come to Him, and sending His holiest and best-beloved Son for the express purpose of bringing those who are far off into peace and friendship with Him,—hearing this same doctrine proclaimed by the mild and persuasive eloquence of the preacher to whom I listened in my youth,—I rejoice that the most careful and persevering studies of all my subsequent years have tended only to give it a deeper and firmer hold on my heart. It would sometimes appear as though a very great and violent departure from a form of belief to which the mind has been long accustomed, had the effect of so unsettling it as to render it afterwards almost incapable of finding a resting place for its faith and hope. It would seem as though the impulse being once strongly given in the direction of doubt and disbelief, there was sometimes an almost impossibility, certainly a very great difficulty, of checking the tendency to continue in the same direction; and hence, perhaps, from a creed originally of the largest dimensions, the ultimate transition has occasionally been to what I cannot help considering the forlorn and

miserable state of having no belief at all. I am thankful, I repeat, that, in my own case, the path of continued and by no means fettered,—or that I am aware, timid inquiry, has led to no felt necessity of any material change in the creed of my earlier years; and that what change there may have been has rather been in the way of addition than of diminution. I am thankful that the tendency of my subsequent reading and thought and study has been, not only to confirm me in what, from the first, I learned to believe of the one God and of His Son Jesus Christ; but to open before me still wider and more attractive views of God's fatherly character and purposes, and to give me a deeper interest in Christ, as Himself the clearest revelation of all that God desires and loves in man, and has made him, when once a thoroughly filial spirit has entered into his heart, capable of becoming. And though all that I now believe would, perhaps, in the estimation of many, be accounted a scanty creed, yet I am thankful for the conviction, deepened on my mind by the inquiries and meditations of successive years, that the few great truths which it comprehends are really the elements of all that is valuable and vital in the religion and morality of Christians generally; that they form the substance of the wisdom which is to be gathered from the teachings and life of Christ; and that they are fitted to supply the most powerful and abiding inducements to make His word the nourishment of our souls, and His

spirit our guide to the knowledge and love of God, and His example the measure and the model of our obedience and devotion to God.

Nor is it without thankfulness that I now think of the tendency which there has long been in my mind, and which has grown stronger with increasing years, to look rather, in the various doctrines maintained by my fellow-Christians, for their points of agreement than their points of difference; to trace down whatever real beauty and excellence and usefulness has appeared in their lives, through all their diversities of professed belief, to some common and living root of a true faith in their hearts; and to account that the purest and most valuable Christianity which I could find acknowledged by them all, and practically animating and influencing them all. This tendency of mind may have made me more ready to put my hearers in remembrance of the great and holy principles which they themselves profess, than to let them be mere witnesses of my conflicts with what they and I might deem error in the opinions of others. It may have also made me careful in all that I have attempted for the removal of such error, not to endanger or depreciate any wholesome truth which might be held in combination with it; not to pull up or injure any of the wheat while endeavouring to uproot the tares. But these are not results, if such there have been, for which, in my review of the past, I feel any regret. Much rather, I should feel

disposed to number them among my causes for thankfulness and rejoicing.

And a like account also I should make of any prominence which I may have given in my preaching, to matters having a direct bearing on the improvement of the heart and life. With the Apostle, "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir up" the faith and love and devotion of my hearers, "by putting them in remembrance" of "the exceeding great and precious promises" which have been "given unto us;" of "the high and holy calling wherewith we are called of God in Jesus Christ," no less than to "be partakers of the Divine nature," by escaping from "the corruption that is in the world," through ungoverned desires and lusts. With the Apostle I think it right to be earnest in keeping before my own mind, and the minds of my fellow-believers, the importance and necessity of "giving all diligence," that we may "add to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." With the Apostle I also believe that "if these things be in us, and abound, they will make us that we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." If, therefore, I have, in my preaching, dwelt more upon things of this kind, "the things that pertain unto life and godliness,"

than upon questions of controversy, my feeling is now much more one of thankfulness than of regret, that I have been disposed and enabled to do so.

Before quitting the subject of my causes for thankfulness, when I look back upon the forty years during which I have here ministered, I cannot but include among them the great and continued kindness which I have experienced from the members of my congregation, both collectively and individually; the pleasant terms on which I have lived with my successive colleagues, and the large measure of health and strength which I have enjoyed for the performance of my duties.

God and man have both been very kind to me. But that is a thought to awaken no little regret for all the deficiencies, which I am conscious have been not few, in my exertions to serve them in return. I cannot help also feeling regret for every appearance of deficiency in the impressions made on the minds and hearts of my hearers. I cannot help remembering that I have often had to wish that there were more signs of devotional earnestness and fervour amongst us, as well as more readiness to take an active part in works of Christian usefulness, connected with the proper business and duty of a Christian church. Whether preachers or hearers be most in fault for whatever may be the short-comings amongst us in this respect, God knows. Not improbably, it is almost equally divided between them. May He stir us all up to greater diligence and zeal in the future!

But in that future I cannot now expect to have any large part remaining—at least for continuance of ministerial labours. The years must now, at most, be very few, during which I can hope, or indeed allow myself, to occupy my present station. My day of active exertion is now far advanced towards its evening; and to its evening, if permitted to come, I may naturally look forward as a time for comparative rest. So long, however, as I may still be able to remain with you, I hope I shall not cease "to stir you up by putting you in remembrance" of the great truths which we agree in believing, and the fruits of holiness which ought to grow from our faith. Certainly, my wish and motive so to stir you up are no less strong than ever. They have, on the contrary, been increasing in strength with my conviction of the need which the human soul has of religious faith and hope, and with the earnestness of my desire that every human being could be brought to see and feel the beauty and glory of life spent under the influence of such faith and hope. For my own part, I think I can truly say, that I have no possession, no blessing, which I so much value, as my firm assurance of God's fatherly presence and Providence, and my steadfast expectation of immortality. So assured, and so looking forward, I feel no inferiority of age to youth —no wish to exchange the years which I now number for those of an earlier season; because I have long been accustomed to consider life, in each of its successive stages, as only part of a progress to be

for ever continued—a progress which death only transfers to new scenes—a progress in which the same God and Father will ever be nigh to bless and help forward those who seek His aid, and desire to be and to do all of which He has made them capable.

I introduced what I have been saying to you this morning with the words of the Apostle; I will conclude with an earnest repetition of his wish: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." AMEN.

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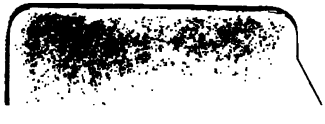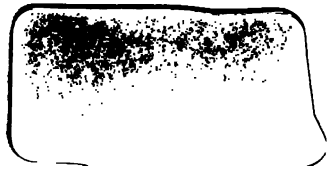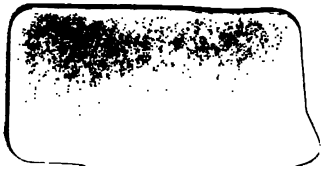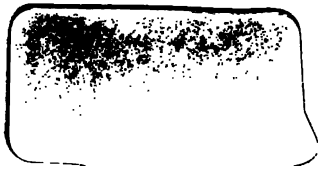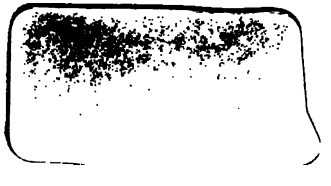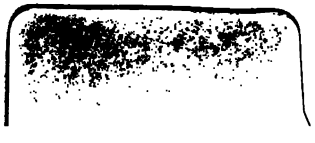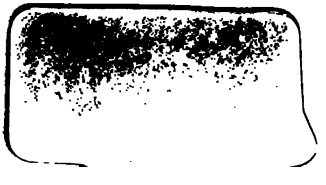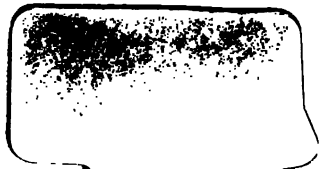
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